



The Full Glory of Diantha

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PHILIP
VERRILL
MIGHELS



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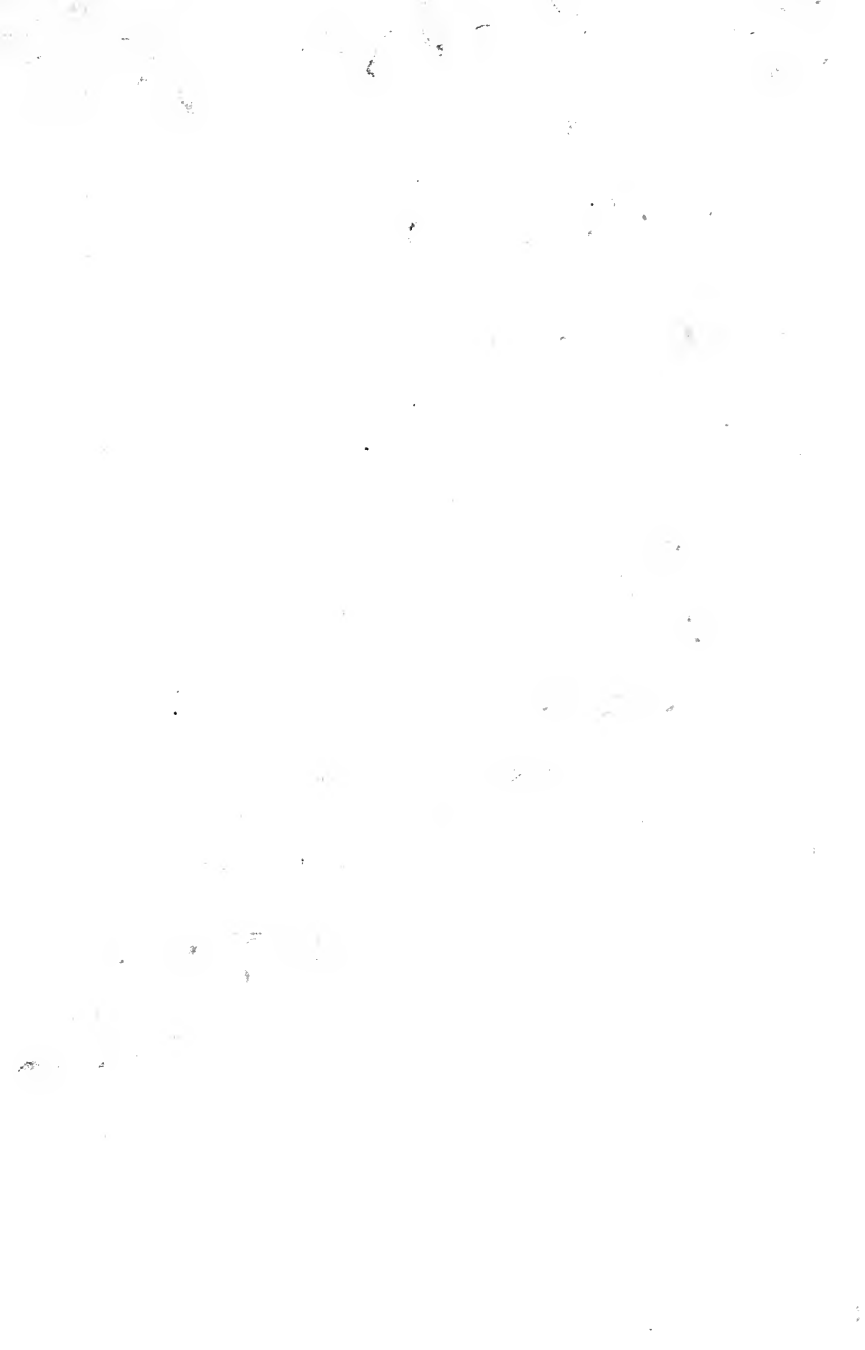
The Full Glory of Diantha



An unusual, fascinating novel of New York life with some scenes in a typical mining camp of the West. There is an entrancing love story and strong delineation of character.

MRS.
PHILIP
VERRILL
MIGHELS





THE FULL GLORY OF DIANTHA

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BY

MRS. PHILIP VERRILL MIGHELS



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1909

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Dedicated to
SIR RENNELL RODD
Poet and Statesman

~~193439~~

FOREWORD

When God created the first human pair in the primeval garden, it is said that he called the man "Hadama," which is to say "Earth," and the woman, "Hayva," which is to say "Spirit." His divine plan was to mix the two elements into a perfect whole, thus evolving a race of beings which should unite the mineral, the animal and the heavenly kingdoms into one.

The man was to become spiritualized earth, the woman to be drawn from her too ethereal condition into partaking of the elements of earth itself—thus the two should serve to rebuild and re-create the other until at last they stood on a common plane as proper and equal companions for the journey, hand-in-hand, thither.

For many thousands of years has the process been going on, and still the battle wages between these two diverse elements, first one winning, then the other. In many cases she finds that Earth as revealed in man, remains obdurate. And to his ken it appears that Spirit as expressed in woman, is fantastic. Thus it has come to pass that for her own protection, that she may find her true-mate, who is willing to be lifted up, and not drag her down too far from her native sphere, that the greatest study of woman has become the important one of man himself.

Every natural woman yearns for an established abid-

FOREWORD

ing-place to call her own, over which she can reign like the queen bee of a little kingdom. Perhaps that is her very first instinct in preparation for what is to follow. Then comes the yearning of her hungry maternal heart to cry out in ecstasy with Hayva, "I have gotten a man-child from the Lord," for any normal woman stands side by side with the primeval mother. It is her heritage, God-given.

But she cannot work out her destiny save through law and order. She needs man in all the glory of his acquired angelhood, with the earth in him suppressed, to hold her close, to protect her, to give her the joys of companionship, and also that which is his hardest task, to be willing for her to keep her immortal soul, all of which will make of this world a heaven so sweet and so beautiful that earth here below makes dim the promised delights of the beyond.

It sometimes happens that true-mates do find each other. With the possibility of winning such a guerdon as this, why should not a young woman enter upon such a quest with all her heart and all her soul, turning to all points of the compass to watch for the "coming of his blessed presence?"

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THE FULL GLORY OF DIANTHA

CHAPTER I

THE WISH ON THE APPLE BLOSSOMS

NOW this is the story of Diantha of Canada, and it began on that morning when she brought her apple blossoms from home and placed them in the little blue jug on her desk in the office of the Lockwood Lumber Company where straightway they precipitated all the unusual happenings of that day.

The firm for whom she was bookkeeper consisted of two partners. One, the senior, was Horace J. Lockwood, a fierce Yankee of trade and finance, and he was bent and old and weather-beaten. The other was Stanley Everton, who acted as a sort of Providence between his partner and the clerks in the establishments, both east and west. The offices were located on Broadway, New York City, and the chief lumber-camp was situated on Indian River in the Sierra Nevada Mountains in the northern part of California, at a place called Boulder Camp.

While Lockwood was crabbed and querulous with age and selfishness, his constant thinking of money having hardened the arteries of his heart, Everton, the junior partner, with a touch of frost on his temples, had not yet

reached his thirty-seventh year and was wiry and active in all his movements. He was possessed of an infinite good-humor and kindliness of heart that endeared him to all the men in the office, and the touch of old-fashioned courtesy he gave to the bookkeeper, had set an example to be followed by the rest of the men in the office.

This was the environment in which Diantha March found herself on that bright morning in May, gazing on the apple blossoms before her and thinking of the wish she had made upon them the night previous.

Diantha was tall and fair, crowned with an aureole of copper-gold hair and though her eyes were gray only, at times the emotions that surged through her caused an expansion of the pupils that filled the iris and made them appear to be strangely black. She was pulsing full of life and energy, a true daughter of the North, where the vigors of the climate only bring out the more power and personality in the stresses of combating nature. Diantha March was not the kind of young woman whose plan of life was to be satisfied with a long or even successful period of employment or the independence of the modern young woman in New York City.

Upon the blossoms before her she had made known her secret desires to the mysterious fates in the hope that they should hear her and grant her some kind of answer. "North, south, east or west," was the way she phrased it, "I wish to find the man of my heart and to become his wife and the mother of his children."

It was a frank confession. But Diantha March was a natural woman like her foremothers before her, and held to primordial ways in spite of the overwhelming

odds in favor of modern civilization. Her thoughts were demanding the coming of that man of her heart. What was the value of her business success, her money in bank, her youth and all else if he never came? North, south, east, she had not yet beheld him.

"If there be such a man as I dream of, like the glorious knights of old, true, clean-hearted and brave, and I do not find him here, I shall know that he is in the great West; for the people there are still elemental enough to care more for love and chivalry than for anything else in the world," she was saying to herself. "And there he will be, tall and strong and blue-eyed — I could not imagine myself loving any but a blue-eyed man —"

She was interrupted by someone. "Look at the apple blossoms!"

It was Burns, the traveling man for the firm, who stood there and smiled at the flowers of spring and wanted to know where they had come from. And she told him frankly how they had been passed around the night before at the house of a friend of hers for the whole party of girls to wish on for whatever they desired in the harvest time.

"And what did you wish for?" he demanded.

"Oh, just for a trip to the West," she said, demurely.

"By the way, the Company needs a new bookkeeper out at Boulder Camp," he said meaningly, "and we've got to find one to-day. I don't suppose you'd want to go out there and grow up with the country?"

She was startled in spite of herself. "Not to-day, I'm quite sure," she responded smiling, and yet much

disturbed within, so that her eyes took on that darkling look that made such a contrast to her fairness of hair and complexion.

She hardly knew when Burns ceased talking and returned to his desk.

"If I can't find him anywhere else I might go—" she was saying to herself, and still she was thinking of that splendid creature of her imagination.

Some way, in spite of her efforts to clothe him in the garb of a hero, he persisted in taking on a very modern appearance, as if he walked Broadway and even came into the very office where she sat at her desk poring over those books of hers. Perhaps he was not west at all. But then where was he? Why did he not appear upon the scene in response to that longing of her soul? How long would she have to wait to decide whether to go west or not? What if she should apply for the position and go out to Boulder Camp, even as an adventure?

A shadow fell in at the door and she heard a step she knew. In spite of herself a faint flush overspread her fair face to the roots of her copper-gold hair. Yet she kept her eyes on her column of figures. She knew who it was without looking up—that Stanley Everton was the man who had entered there.

"Good morning, Miss March," he said in his usual cheerful tone, then he hesitated and gazed at the branch of apple blossoms in the little blue jug so long she had to take notice, and then his eyes met hers in a strange way that caused her to wonder. What was it she saw in his glance? Certainly it was an expression she had

never felt there before—"felt" was the word, for it shot through her like a ray of lightning. He seemed about to speak, then resisted the impulse and passed on.

Diantha had a strong intuitive instinct that made her sensitive to the thoughts of others. Some way she was disturbed. Not till afterwards, however, did she remember this moment; for it was broken in upon by the entrance of a stranger who was so different in manner and appearance from Mr. Everton that it struck her unpleasantly. He was portly and bold-eyed and handsome, with a conscious air of self-splendor that radiated from him as if he owned the earth and barely consented to allow others to step upon it.

He made it suit his purpose to stop at her desk, lift his heavy eyebrows at the sight of the soft blossoms standing there, and then he smiled in a confidential sort of way and said, "Beg pardon, but can you tell me if Everton is in?"

She simply waved her hand in the direction of the inner office, and returned to her books. She loathed a man of that stamp even if he did have iron-gray hair with his dark-brown moustache.

Presently there crept in almost silently, the great man of the office, old Horace J. Lockwood, with his peering eyes and bent shoulders and yellow leathery skin, watchfully observing if all his slaves were at work. She thought to herself—"What would they all have done here without the leavening influence of Mr. Everton, who was so human that he stood between the poor clerks and the niggardliness of old Horace, who would have ground them to powder otherwise. How could they help

—all of them— from being grateful to him for his many kindnesses and his intervention on their behalf, when that old inquisitor of a later day took a notion to give the screws another twist with threat of shorter pay and longer hours, until they feared his very presence.”

He glanced at her desk as he passed and the sight of so much beauty in the dull old office fell athwart a cross and crooked nature and brought forth a frown. He went into the inner office where sat his partner, Stanley Everton, and the just-arrived visitor.

“Who the devil is that fine-looking young woman out there, presiding over the books and the apple blossoms?” came a voice as the window of the office was being opened for more air, and then the rest of the speech was lost.

Then the old man’s familiar utterance floated out where Diantha could not escape hearing it. A spirit of malice must have taken possession of him. He spoke in a high-pitched querulous tone.

“Wall,” he drawled, “I see the spring has come here in the office, apple blossoms, to turn all the young men’s thoughts of love and all such nonsense and tomfoolery!” He hesitated and then added to his partner mockingly, “Why don’t ye git married, Stanley? ’Bout time ain’t it?”

Diantha could not help hearing Everton’s reply, for it was given with a forced laugh. “Maybe I might,” he said, “if only I could find a broken-down widow without—any—illusions, hey, Quincy!”

And the three men laughed together.

All the light in the world went out at that moment to the girl sitting there gazing on those flowers of spring in the little blue jug.

CHAPTER II

“HIS SATANIC MAJESTY” PASSES

DIANTHA MARCH had wished on the apple blossoms the dearest desire of her heart, and she knew now, because of the pang these words caused her, that there had been a tender spot in her affections for Stanley Everton, in spite of all the denials she had given herself and that she had been self-deceived — that she had been thinking of him when she had wished to find the man of her heart. She was ashamed and she was angry to see that tears had fallen upon the page of her ledger, and she brushed them away rudely and roughly.

The stranger passed by on his way out, glancing boldly at her, but she ignored him absolutely.

Presently Burns came and stood by her desk and his manner was mysterious. “Do you know who that is?” he whispered. “He saw you all right — he has an enormous optic for a fine-looking girl — and he wanted to know who that splendid creature was, that was presiding over the books and the apple blossoms.”

But at that moment, Diantha was angered to the very limit of her endurance. She could understand why women were glad to go into convents to get away from the sight of all the men on the earth.

She frowned at Burns and waved for him to go on to his desk.

"Colonel Quincy knows a pretty girl," he exclaimed, delightedly. "He has pictures of every beautiful actress that has come to town for the last thirty years — and also their autographs — makes a fad of it — wonderful collection!"

A perfect blaze of rage swept over the girl. This name was enough to give her cause for resentment. It was that of a well-known clubman, known as "His Satanic Majesty," for the number of foolish girls he had made fads of for a brief season, only to forget them later in the light of a new face. One of these had been an impulsive young woman of her own acquaintance, who had now become, in her despair, a reckless member of lower Bohemia, and was known to herself and her group, as the poor "Lost Pleiad."

She waved Burns away this time with a gesture of horror.

Burns gave a low whistle of astonishment, then he smothered a bubble of laughter, and went back to his place again.

Diantha's eyes filled with tears. Her heart ached dully. She was hurt through and through at the thought that her Mr. Everton was not at all as she had imagined him to be. She had thought him so high and splendid — a man among men above reproach. But the revelation that morning required that she should tear her respect and admiration for him from her heart forever.

Full of grief she sat in judgment upon herself for her

own lack of understanding. "To think he should be a man like that!" and she wrought with herself to know why she should have been so blind and deaf and dumb.

Her old-time stubbornness came to her aid as she implored all the gods and deities of ancient and of modern times to enable her to crush from her heart any lingering feeling that might be there for one now proved to be unworthy, and at the same time to send to her the realization of the image and ideal she bore so sacredly in her soul.

She could see him standing there, white and clean and altogether lovely, with an expectant look upon his manly face as if he were almost listening for the sound of a footstep — which should be her own.

Why had he not sought for her more determinedly! That lumber-camp out in the wilds of the Sierras! Was he there busy at his work and she here in cold, cruel New York with three thousand miles of continent between them? Was it a premonition, a prophetic sense that made her think of these things? Was he waiting there for her — waiting for her to come to him — as her dear father had waited in Canada for her mother to cross the great ocean from Scotland ere they two could meet? She caught a new hope from the thought. What was to hinder her from going?

She lifted her head proudly to see that Mr. Everton had returned and was standing by her desk. If a touch of frost was in her manner, what wonder?

It was only to tell her that she could have the bond she had wanted to buy, and she realized that he had always been nice to her in business matters and that it

was only justice to remember this fact. Indeed that there was no call for any other than a business friendship between them.

But he still lingered.

"How beautiful those apple blossoms are!" he said. "Do you know, they make me think of the time when I was young —"

She met his gaze with a look as if she said, "What? You!"

But he went on like one thinking aloud, "and stood in the orchard in the springtime — with — my —" he hesitated and then he dared to say it "my — first love."

Diantha was not as she had been when first she had come to the city. Then she would have blushed crimson and have been so embarrassed that she could not have lifted her eyes at such a speech as this from a man she had so admired. Not so now. She simply drew up at these foolish words and looked him in the eyes with all the disapproval at her command.

"Let us stick to business, Mr. Everton," she said deliberately.

If these were the arts at his command, he should find no soft-hearted, impulsive, easily-flattered girl to play them upon; for resolute Diantha March was impervious to such arts.

He looked at her in a puzzled way that was almost disconcerting. But she never relaxed. He should not talk to her of his "first love"—first love indeed! And how many loves after that she wondered could he count up? It might be as large a gallery as Col. Quincy's. And at that thought she became as cold as ice. Resent-

fully she considered to herself, "Did Mr. Everton flatter himself that she was like that broken-down widow who had lost her illusions and was willing to be taken up and threaded as the thirtieth or the fortieth bead on the string of his affections? Not she then — she was to be the first love who should stand under the apple tree in the orchard in the springtime, herself. And her Parsifal was there waiting for her now.

"Have I done anything, Miss March, to make you angry?" he asked more puzzled than before.

"Not at all, only anything else than business seems out of place in the office."

"You must lay the blame on the apple blossoms then," he said smiling, and returned to the inner office.

CHAPTER III

THE COMPACT

WHEN the noon-hour approached Stanley Everton returned and gave Miss March instructions that kept her in her place until all the clerks and even his partner had gone out to lunch. When the last man had issued forth he dropped his business tone and changed the subject abruptly. "Miss March, I have something to say to you," he spoke eagerly. "You can have twenty-four hours to think it over in before giving me an answer. I am a business man, you are a business woman. Something has happened to me this morning — I am thinking about a partnership for life — and I ask you to consider the proposition. I admire you more than any woman I know and I ask you to be my wife."

Diantha sat as one frozen, gazing at him with slowly gathering, suppressed anger. "The first time I saw you," continued he protestingly, "I said then that if I were a marrying man you were the kind of a girl I would choose — so splendidly competent and equal to any position in life."

Diantha held back the angry words and angry tears and tried to deserve this compliment by being equal to this present moment. She became preternaturally careful of every word she chose. And she tried to appear at her ease.

"When first I came to New York," she said lightly, "I might have believed you in earnest, but I am not so unsophisticated now."

"What? you are not going to say 'No'?" he exclaimed with a kind of incredulity.

"That's exactly what I am saying," she responded, with a hint of hoarseness in her voice and a flash in her eyes.

"Well, of all the things!" he continued with a quizzical smile. "You wouldn't treat me like that?"

"Oh, yes," she said, smiling scornfully at him, "I am not to be had for the asking alone."

He seemed taken by surprise and turned over idly the yellow telegram he held in his hand. His voice was less confident than before as he spoke in return. "I admired you the first day I saw you — Miss March —"

"And that was five years ago," remarked Diantha calmly.

"Now, what is the matter?" he asked smilingly. "Admit that I have known you for five years and have not asked you till to-day! What seems to be the obstacle? Is there some other man ahead of me?"

"No," she replied impatiently, "I have never yet seen the man I would be willing to marry."

"Oh," and he lifted his eyebrows with a serio-comic look, "and are you still so young as to be romantic?"

She noted the gold glinting in his mouth, the touch of silver frosting his almost black hair, the strong chin, the wide forehead, the splendidly cut features and the kindly glance in his blue eyes as if he were humoring a self-willed child, and that last made her rebel.

"Yes, I shall never grow old enough to be beyond

that," she replied unashamed, her gray eyes meeting his unflinchingly. "That is just it! You believe in nothing, while I—I am no broken-down widow who—has lost her illusions! I am not the woman for you to be asking—it's some one else."

"Oh!" he exclaimed, as if he had been struck to the heart. "Oh, what a brute you must think me! I beg your pardon, Miss March. I'm sorry you overheard that idle speech—it meant nothing—it was just foolishness—I didn't mean that—not in the least—"

But the girl arose from her desk and closed her books with an air of finality. He noted her strength and suppleness combined, her almost superb poise of head, and calculated the difference it would make to see her gowned in diaphanous lace instead of the neat shirt-waist and rainy-day skirt. She would carry any costume well, he thought. He would have to begin all over again. No wonder she was angry, but if he persisted long enough he could win her, was in his thoughts as he gazed at her.

He was good and fine and splendid, as men go, but there was a touch of the rogue in him, as there is in all men.

He wanted to marry her now a thousandfold more than he had an hour before. To be denied made him value her as beyond the price of rubies.

She realized what he was offering her. But the wealth and luxury and power which he could give was as dross in her sight.

"I am sorry you are so angry with me," he said gently. "Take till to-morrow to think it over."

"Yes, that is just it!" she cried, full of resentment. "How can I help being angry? Why, we girls of Pleiades Court think marriage the most serious thing in the world. When one of our group was asked to marry a man last year, she took three months to think it over before she said 'Yes.' It wasn't the bijou gold and white flat he offered her, and the brasses and crystal and fancy fixings that she was thinking of; it was 'The Man,' and if she had not thought Howard Rose worthy, why, Vivian would not have married him!"

"Ah, yes," said Everton, "I met them last night in the Elevated—a very happy pair. And they spoke of you and your Pleiades girls, and she was carrying apple blossoms for you all to wish on, she told me. She is a sweet little lady—I envied him. Take three months, if you like, but say 'Yes!'"

She was piling her books up. "I have been in the city long enough to understand," she said, with downcast eyes. "You have exhausted every other kind of pastime, like racing and betting and gambling and yachting—and you wish to marry for an experiment—and this is your day for asking some girl—if not me, then another!" and she shrugged her shoulders disdainfully. "You think you will be satisfied with me because I am healthy and young, and that I will be grateful for the remnants of your life. And so I might if I were like other girls—if I did not cherish 'illusions.'"

At last he, too, was growing angry, as he listened to this most uncomplimentary view of his proposal, but he covered it up under a pretense of amusement. "Oh, I

see! What you want is love in a cottage, with only a crust of bread — ”

“ No, not merely love in a cottage,” she cried, with her eyes darkening into almost black. “ What I demand first *is* love — and I will take it if even it be in a hut on the hillside under the blue sky and close to the red earth, for I am an elemental woman and I wish to mate with an elemental man.”

He seemed bewildered, at first, then he resumed his perfunctory style of speech to cover up the emotions beginning to surge through him. “ Well, what’s the matter with me?” he said, half reproachfully, yet with a smile in his eyes.

“ O Mr. Everton, why don’t you be true to yourself?” she entreated. “ You are no longer a natural man, for you have grown hardened. You are steeped in city life and its luxuries like a pickle in its brine or a sardine in its oil — well preserved, perhaps, but no longer alive to real things and true things.”

“ Nonsense!” he ejaculated, but he was annoyed, nevertheless. “ You are absurd! Why, I’ll bet anything the ideal you are dreaming of is some impossible kind of a creature that never existed — not a real man.”

“ No, I am not,” said Diantha, in a low, sweet voice. “ I am thinking of my father up in Canada, keeping himself clean and pure-hearted, waiting, waiting, all those years until my mother crossed the sea and came all the way from Scotland to find him there, — waiting for her. And I am thinking of the day when I felt the call upon me and knew I must go forth to the east and south and



west to do as she had done, in obedience to fate; and how my father pressed me to tell him why I must go so far away from them all. I was the youngest of twelve, and his favorite child."

The picture she drew held him fascinated. "Go on," he said, as she paused suddenly. "Tell me what you said."

She obeyed him as simply as a child would have done. "I adored my father, Mr. Everton. I wanted his approval," Diantha replied. "Kneeling down before him, I took his hand and kissed it gently and confessed to him the truth. 'Father, I want to find the man of my heart.' And he said, 'You can go, Diantha,' for he knew that that was the way mother had come to him."

Stanley Everton stood looking at her intently. He tried to speak in his accustomed speech, but the words died away and left him deeply affected. Could it be possible that a girl could love her father like that? What would he do if a little daughter of his should kiss his hand? Somehow his heart gave a great throb as he realized how much he must have missed all these years of his life in not having any of the sweetness of domestic ties to bind him fast.

He had thought his freedom a great thing. Now he knew it was only a mockery. Yet a great sense of concern was creeping in upon him about something else than business. It was about himself as the father of a little daughter. He tried to conceal his thoughts, however, and said vaguely, "Oh, it is hardly possible that women can love men as much as all that; not even their fathers, then much less their husbands."

There was a look of wonder on Diantha's face. She could not comprehend what it was that had struck him so forcibly. But she answered him from her heart and gave him another sensation. "Oh, yes, we women do, Mr. Everton! All we ask is for the men-folks to let us love them — for them to be kind and affectionate instead of being so hard-hearted and selfish and mean."

"You don't think I am hard-hearted?" he protested, "not really."

"You were kind-hearted enough when you started out," she replied, "but you are hardened now, or you could never have made that idle speech of yours."

The slip of yellow paper fluttered from under his hand and fell to the floor at her feet. As Diantha picked it up to return to him, it opened so that she could not fail to see the words written there.

Lockwood Lumber Company,

Send first-class bookkeeper to-day — can't wait.

MARTIN HARRIS, *Manager,*
Boulder Camp, California.

A bright flush of color overspread her face and her eyes grew luminous. "O Mr. Everton, let me have the place!" she exclaimed.

"What!" he cried in a high pitched accent of incredulity. "Would you leave New York? Why, you must be crazy!"

"Oh, no, I am not," she replied, "it is natural to want to escape from the city and go back to one's primeval feelings, once in a while at least. Confess, Mr. Everton, don't you yourself sometimes feel a longing stealing

over you to find yourself in some open place where you can give a great cry out to relieve your pent-up soul and there will be nobody to hear? Some place on a lofty peak at the top of the world, where you can gaze across a great space and see no one? Where you can have the luxury of being alone?"

She leaned over toward him as if she would have the truth for once from him.

"Never!" he exclaimed, startled in spite of himself. "Never! I would rather be a lamp-post in New York City than to be a man who has to live in the wilds. I love all this bustle and noise and action. It is life to live here; it would be death to be alone on a mountain-top."

"Ah, Mr. Everton, you didn't feel like that when you were young," Diantha protested, "not in those days when you stood under the apple trees in the orchard with — your first love. I am sorry for you. But this telegram! If you would only speak the word!"

"What!" he interrupted, "and let you go out of my life?"

"I must go away somewhere soon," she said. "I have always wanted to go West — and now more than ever!"

"To meet that elemental man of yours, I suppose," he spoke mockingly.

"And why not?" Diantha returned quickly. "If the man of my heart cannot come here to find me why should I not go to find him?" She hesitated a second and then added, as if to herself, "I shall never find him here."

"No, my dear Miss March, not here nor anywhere

else," Everton spoke determinedly. "The sort of man you have in mind grows nowhere on the face of the earth. It is a great pity, of course, but unfortunately the fact remains that we all are pretty much alike, in spite of these dreams you sweet young women have of us."

"I don't believe it," she cried indignantly, "I know there is someone somewhere, a real man (with some faults of course), but with a pure heart and a true nature, waiting for me even as I am waiting for him, even if we may never meet in all our lives."

Stanley Everton was becoming nettled with all this opposition against his will. He was in arms against this unknown intruder who stood in his way. He ventured to address her in a more familiar manner, intending to break down that resistance of hers at once.

"My dear Miss Diantha, I can't imagine how you have lived in the city all these years and have preserved such infantile innocence as that," he remonstrated. "Let me open your eyes. I have lived in the world nearly thirty-seven years, and I assure you there is no such man. I will bet you a thousand dollars you can't find him."

"The idea!" she exclaimed, with lowered brows, "I do not bet."

There was silence for a brief moment.

Everton was, as he had said, "a business man." The love of the hazardous had become second-nature to him, and this element in him now suggested a way out of this tangle that made his eyes sparkle with excitement.

"I have a proposition to make," he began. "I will

“speak the word, and you may have this position that you ask for. You are to go out to that end of the world and seek for your elemental man — this man of your heart. I will give you six months — wait!”

He waved his hand to her to be allowed to finish — “with the proviso that if you find him, I will place in the bank to your credit one thousand dollars, and if you do not find him — you are to marry — me!”

She sat there a little overwhelmed and afraid of him.

“But there must be no mistake,” he added eagerly, “he must be all you have claimed and demanded, no ordinary mortal will do, remember. And further — if you can convince *me* that he is all *you* think he is, I will make it five thousand.”

“How do you mean?” she asked, surprised out of her usual self into the betrayal of a touch of curiosity.

“Why, when you find him, you’ll have to fetch him to New York City. That is understood,” he said. “You can’t tell anything about a man till you’ve tried him in the city and seen how he stands the test. That would not be fair to me.”

“Wouldn’t it?” she asked doubtfully.

“Of course not,” he exclaimed. “Now, first of all, he must be a real man — not a softy! He is to be innocent, unsullied by the world and all that, you know, but a man with fists — he must fight for you, be a savage at heart, you know. He must be elemental or he won’t do. I say you can’t find him, and you say you can. Do you accept?”

“Yes, Mr. Everton,” said Diantha March, quietly, “I do.”

At that reply, he leaned over to the little blue jug, broke off a spray of apple blossom, and almost defiantly placed it in his coat lapel. As he straightened up, the frail petals fell off, as is their way, leaving only a dry twig there, over his heart. But he only gave a quizzical smile as if undismayed by the portent.

It was six hours later in the day, that he placed her in the section for her overland journey for the shores washed by the Pacific. She looked at him with a new shyness and timidity come upon her, while he was still nettled with jealousy of this unknown and insubstantial rival who was not, as yet.

"I suppose you will be falling in love with old Lockwood's nephew out there in Boulder, the first thing, or even young Quincy! It would be just like you women! Go through the woods and pick up a crooked stick at the last." He was smiling down on her discontentedly.

She was a little afraid of him, and yet she remembered how kind he had been.

"Not I!" replied Diantha brightly. "No crooked sticks for me — not after knowing a man like you! He would have to be a pretty fine specimen to eclipse you in your good qualities, you know, Mr. Everton!"

"Oh," said he, in that peculiar accent of doubt, "and have I got some good qualities?"

"Indeed, you have," she said fervently. "Why, we couldn't live in the office, when Mr. Lockwood gets on one of his half-human moods, if it wasn't for you. You are well-known there — for your kindness of heart. Do you know what we call you?"

He smiled, "No! what?"

“Everybody’s friend.”

“Well!” he ejaculated with a sigh, “you are going to have your way. You are going forth to find that man of your heart, but remember —”

The train was making ready to start — “Oh, you’ll be left,” the girl cried, “the car is going —”

“But remember, Miss Diantha,” he continued gravely and undisturbed, “I have your promise that if you do not find him, you will come back and marry — me!”

CHAPTER IV

THE STAGE-DRIVER EXPLAINS

FIVE days had elapsed since Diantha had left New York City for Boulder Camp. She had now reached the Junction, the nearest railway station to the lumber-settlement, and, after sending her telegram to the expectant Harris, had taken her place in the stage to be driven the remaining miles to her destination.

After so many days close travel she was grateful for the chance to ride beside the stage-driver up on the high seat, outside in the fresh air. It was full of pine fragrance as they went along under the trees in that lofty altitude, and Diantha felt herself exhilarated to the highest degree with the thought of the new world opening out before her.

The driver was a quaint grizzled old fellow who was inclined to the spinning of yarns. She managed, however, to hold him to facts about the people in Boulder whom shortly she was to be scanning and studying for herself.

He told her of Mrs. Mackintosh and her little boy, Tommy, and her brave efforts after the death of the Captain to take charge of the Company's tavern. He deplored the meanness of "the boys" in teaching Tommy to swear like a trooper.

"And the little rascal ain't five yet," he added dryly.

Diantha encouraged him to go on.

Slowly he revealed things about the little settlement. "The boys air feelin' a little blue," he said, "'cause Ezra Watson has lost his job and there's a new bookkeeper comin' out from New York to take his place."

"And why did Watson lose his job?" Diantha asked as indifferently as she could.

"Oh, Harris is down on him fur somethin', I dunno what," said the driver, "but not even Barry, himself, could prevent him sendin' for a new man. He is expected any day now. Git up there, Andy."

"Barry?" she repeated, "who is Barry?"

The driver laughed. "Oh, he's the 'Great I Am' of the camp. Why, he's the nephew of old Lockwood himself, the big millionaire of New York who runs the hull thing."

"Is his name Lockwood?" she asked puzzled.

"Yep, Barry Lockwood," and he gave his whip a crack, "he's the gentleman of the camp. The boys thinks it's the mark of manhood to grow a beard, but Barry is clean shaved, and keeps his hands white, and drives fine horses and wears New York clothes. But they ain't down on him fur that! They like him 'cause he drinks with 'em and gambles and has a good time with 'em generally."

"Oh!" was all Diantha could think to say. She had not reckoned on such a state of society as that out in the little town. She knew it held good in novels and tales of the West, but she had always held that the habits of drinking and gambling were just as common in London

and New York. Morality and soberness were not limited to any locality.

She still held fast the image of her father as an icon in her faith that there were good men to be found everywhere.

"Who else is there in the camp?" she asked. "Are there any nice women there besides Mrs. Mackintosh?"

"Yes, there is Miss Read, the school-teacher, and Mrs. Watson, poor Ezra's wife. She's got to take in sewin' now to keep things goin'. But she's always been a great one to help ginerally fur the children's festivals and picnics. Oh, you'd ought to see the schoolhouse church them women got built—that's all that keeps Boulder from being a God-forsaken place for the women and children. Git up, Andy."

Diantha's heart began to fail her. Was this what she had come for? She was almost sorry she had been so determined. But as a counter-thrust, memory reminded her of what was behind her. During the five days of her travel in the cars crossing the continent she had thought it all out, and her pride forbade her ever going back, even if she should be on a fruitless quest. While Mr. Everton was a good business friend, he could never be anything more than that to her. Resolutely she shut her heart against him, and determined that she would show him he was not the only man in the world.

"Oh," said the driver, "there's a new feller at the camp, named Quincy. He's terrible handsome—and dresses up in togs like he was in a drammer of the wild and woolly West. I seen one them once and I nearly bust

a laffin' at it — I never seen no such clothes in my hull life. But he thinks he's a cowboy. His father is one o' them eastern nabobs and sent him out here to get rid of him, I ruther guess — fur he's a kind of a remittance man. He gits his allowance at the office of the Lumber Company. Mrs. Mackintosh and the women tried to git him away from Barry and the drinkin' and the gamblin'; fur he's kinder good-natured like a fool — but I guess it ain't no use! Ye see, Barry Lockwood is the chief spirit of the camp."

"More like the chief villain, I should say," exclaimed Diantha.

"No, miss, he's got a way about him that the ladies likes as you will see for yourself," said the driver, sagely shaking his head.

Diantha rebelled at this idea but went on asking questions about the people of the little settlement and finally inquired how they amused themselves.

He told her that sometimes in the evenings the Cornishmen from the mines near got together and sang choruses, and often they had games of strength, throwing quoits or playing ball or running races, or lifting weights.

"That sounds interesting," she said, "I rather think I shall enjoy that."

"Oh, yes," continued the stage-driver, "I forgot — there's Caspar — he beats them all at the games — he's a kind of a Herkkales, he is — he kin lift twelve hundred pounds on the machine — and four hundred jest by himself. But you wouldn't keer fur him — he ain't got no style about him and he's as cross as a bear with a sore head when he don't like things, which is

ginerally the case. He don't run with the boys and Barry, fur he and Harris flocks together most of the time."

"Oh, yes," said Diantha hopefully, at last, "you haven't told me about Mr. Harris. He's the manager, isn't he?"

"Yeh! and Martin is as plucky as if he was big and tall, which he ain't. He's laid up with rheumaticks jest now, but goes around on two crutches doin' his duty to the Company jest the same. He's pretty mad, I tell you! And we're all expectin' to see a fight any day between him and Barry, the old man's nephew, you know."

Diantha laughed out loud in spite of herself with the reaction of feeling that came over her. That she had come on a wild-goose chase she was convinced. The driver looked at her somewhat puzzled by her sudden burst of merriment.

"You must excuse me," she said, "but it seemed so funny to think of all the men being so on the rampage and only three women trying to do something for order and education in the poor little town. I was wondering if that was about the proportion everywhere else where women were working, trying to make things better, and if that was about the way it usually wound up."

"Oh, now, it ain't so bad," said the driver consolingly; "we're about the same as any other town—you'll find we're pretty human, after all!"

From the top of the rise Diantha looked down and saw below her a beautiful river, and breathed in the draughts of pine-laden atmosphere, and heard the sooth-

ing droning of the mill slowly shutting down and saw a gathering of men in the midst of the habitations that went to make up Boulder Camp.

"Why," she said puzzled, as she observed the peculiar costumes in which they were arrayed, "they've got on blankets and feathers on their heads — are they Indians having a war-dance or what?"

"Oh, that's some of Barry's foolishness! I reckon he's gittin' ready to welcome the new bookkeeper. Ye see, they don't want a new man in the camp to take the bread out of the mouths of the fellers that's already here. But don't you be afraid, miss. When they see a lady's the only passenger, off 'll come all them feathers and blankets in a hurry. And you'll see what perfect gentlemen they can be. It'll be a kind of a joke on them anyway, fur they ain't had a telegram yit saying he's arrived at the Junction."

Diantha thought quickly.

She had sent her telegram signed, "D. March," to Harris as soon as she stepped off the train and this was the reception being prepared for her, believing her to be a man.

She had insisted that a bookkeeper was just a bookkeeper, no more, no less, and had overpersuaded Everton to say nothing about her being a woman for fear they might be prejudiced against her beforehand. Now she would have to take the consequences. In it she saw a way to test the calibre of the men who were to receive her. She would not stay up on the seat with the driver and let them see her in time to prevent the trouble.

“It is getting a little chilly,” she said to the driver. “If you will let me get down and go inside, I shall be much obliged.”

Presently the door shut tightly, and Miss March was safely inside as the stage bowled along its way down the mountain-side to the town.

CHAPTER V

THE BOOKKEEPER FROM NEW YORK

TO tell the truth, the settlement was seething with excitement.

Boulder Camp consisted of scarcely more than a few dozen houses and cabins outside of the Company's tavern, which was a large building with a veranda on the front. This was facing the splendid view of Mount Shasta looming up against the intense blue of the sky. The fresh odor of the sawdust permeated the air spicily, the water of the Indian River splashed and tumbled past in a soothing music that brought one close to nature.

Yet in spite of all this beauty and splendor of mountain, water and forest, it was the human problem that was in the ascendancy—one man trying to rule over the rest whether in the right or the wrong. The driver had said, "Barry is the chief spirit of the camp," but this did not hold good when he ran against the will of Martin Harris, the manager.

Barry, with his white face and scornful smile, had taken up the cause of Ezra Watson, the discharged bookkeeper, and had organized a revolt against Harris, and now he was marching out his fierce-looking men, all in terrible array as if about to sack the town. They were shooting off revolvers and trying to intimidate

the manager and make him reinstate Watson before the arrival of the new man. It was nothing less than inspiring to see that one small man on his crutches standing there alone on the veranda as they made their demands.

"No," he cried hoarsely, "I'll see you in hell first."

"All right," cried the ringleader, "we'll lay for the new man, won't we boys?"

And they roared in reply.

"He shan't take the bread from our mouths!" shouted the spokesman, who was being prompted by Barry Lockwood. "No tenderfeet need apply!"

Another bellow of approval went up from the half-frenzied men.

"We'll make him take the next stage back to where he comes from," yelled the leader of the chorus.

"And what if he won't go?" demanded Martin from the veranda. "You needn't think everybody is cowardly like you—very brave when you are a dozen to one."

There was a sullen murmur from the crowd below. "What'll we do if he won't go, Dow?" asked one of the men who was wrapped in a blanket with chicken feathers stuck in a band about his head.

"He's got to go," yelled Dow, the spokesman, "that's all! We'll make him or he'll have to take the consequences. Now for the last time, Harris, will you take Ezra back again?"

The small sandy haired and bearded man on his crutches leaned over to them defiantly. "No! No, I say! You can't run my business for me. And I'll shoot the first man who lays hands on the man who is com-

ing in on that stage. Do you hear? And when I say a thing I mean it!"

"Oh, now, Harris, what's to prevent us shooting you when it comes to that?" cried the insolent Barry.

"Because you know you'd get strung up in no time," replied Martin, "I'm a United States marshal as well as the manager of this place. The law is on my side."

In the lull that followed this speech, there was a woman who ventured to come out on the veranda and speak to him in a suppressed voice.

"O Mr. Harris, why don't you take Mr. Watson back, and put an end to all this dreadful business? Why, it is a disgrace to the town."

Martin looked at her peculiarly. "This is no place for you, Miss Read, keep the children out of sight till this thing blows over. Not even you can make me change my mind."

Behind her came another woman holding a small boy by the hand. She was full of excitement. "Martin, for God's sake, take poor Ezra back and save us all. I can't stand it!" And the tears were running down her face.

"Now, Mrs. Mackintosh, if I give you the reason I can't take Watson back will you and Miss Read go in and behave yourselves and let me save the honor of this camp? You know I have reasons for everything I do."

The two women looked at each other and then at him.

He lowered his voice to almost a whisper. "I can't

take him back — because he is simply a tool for Lockwood, and it is Lockwood who is putting up this whole job on me. He has gotten the men drunk and is willing to do murder before he gets through just so he can run this camp. Now, go in, girls, and behave yourselves. Where's Caspar? and Quincy, also. Tell them to be ready when I whistle."

At once they took his advice and fled the scene without another word.

Down below stood Barry Lockwood on the lowest step calmly smoking a cigarette, with a peculiar smile upon his mask-like face, so shaven and so pale. A handsome young fellow in theatrical cowboy clothes was standing by the horse from which he had just dismounted. Out by the side of the road was a young man with heavy beard, rumpled hair and broad shoulders, hatless and apparently unconcerned in the exhibition of the masquerading group of lawless beings there assembled, for he was keeping his eye on Martin Harris on the veranda, as if awaiting a signal.

The handsome horseman was young Quincy and the hatless, broad-shouldered man was Caspar. They were to rush to the assistance of the incoming passenger and run him into the tavern while Harris was picking off the mob with buckshot, if they attempted to do them harm.

As all were listening intently for a sound above the murmur of the river, there came the rumble of the stage and its six prancing horses, the hoofs beating out a staccato on the dusty road and the driver cracking his

whip gaily as he made a specious burst of speed into the little hamlet to show off his beautiful young lady passenger to the astonished gaze of the natives.

And on the instant the gang of tough desperadoes and mock Indians rushed out to meet it as it came, with revolvers cracking in a fusillade and themselves yelling like a band of savages.

"Hold on," cried the driver, "fooled you this time." And he laughed like a demon at them in the midst of their pandemonium.

But Caspar and Quincy awaited the signal from Harris.

"No eastern men wanted here!" cried the mob. "Give you one minute to go back where you came from!" cried another voice.

At the stoppage of the coach, with the driver protesting and the men surrounding it, Harris blew his whistle, and Caspar and Quincy made a sudden bolt through the crowd knocking some of them down in the wild and tremendous onrush they made to reach the door before any one else.

Quickly they threw it open, but instead of seizing the occupant and tearing with him madly through the mob to the tavern-steps as they had planned, they stood stock still, which the crowd took for weakness and they pressed all the closer to din into the ears of the man within their demand for his immediate return.

Caspar was the first to recover himself. He began to push the howling brutes away by main force, calling in stentorian tones, "What's the matter with you, you great big fools —"

One fellow went sprawling, as a young and beautiful lady stepped out of the coach, handed down into their midst by Quincy.

She gazed upon them wonderingly but did not seem afraid, though it was a scene and reception not often prepared for a woman.

Those nearest in the crowd, stricken with shame, stood and stared. The whole thing had been turned into a farce.

"It's a woman," was the word whispered along to those in the rear and they began to snatch off the feathers from their heads and to drop the blankets and hide their weapons from sight, while instinctively they divided and drew away from the center to give her room to pass.

"Good afternoon," said the beautiful young lady to them all, and there was a lifting of hats in response and awkward bowing to cover the confusion of the moment. Calmly she gazed at them, noting the little man with the fever-bright eyes most of all, and the handsome tall fellow by her side with the melancholy brown eyes and arrayed in cowboy costume like a play-actor, as the driver had told her. Then she took in the form of the man on the other side of her who was like a Hercules, bearded and without a hat, showing rumpled locks and blue eyes with black lashes that met her gaze with a flash of fire. She smiled and chose him out of all that crowd.

"Can I see Mr. Harris?" she said to him engagingly. "I think he is expecting to see me—I am the book-keeper from New York."

CHAPTER VI

HIS FIRST NAME WAS CASPAR

IT was Caspar whom she had chosen to answer her — a case of Greek meeting Greek.

“You see, you signed your telegram, ‘D. March,’” he explained briefly, “and naturally we all thought it was a man bookkeeper that was coming instead of a lady. Harris is on crutches and can’t get around very lively but I’ll take you to him.”

As he turned to lead the way, he found Quincy blocking the path.

“Introduce me, Caspar,” he begged audibly, and as Caspar was carrying her valise, he, Quincy, insisted on taking her umbrella, talking all the way to her about “dear old New York.”

Like one who holds the center of the stage stood Lockwood on the step of the tavern, still smoking in affected calmness. The shock of surprise was still on him, however, and in spite of the lift of his hat and the smile he gave her, Diantha could feel his annoyance at the sight of her.

She had been prepared to find the old man’s nephew not altogether pleasing, but now on her own account she felt an immediate repulsion for him as she noted the upturned corners of his mouth and the red-rimmed lids of his small black eyes.

Although Harris was a plain sandy-bearded man, his manner was all that could be desired, and she liked him at once. Mrs. Mackintosh, with Tommy by the hand, and Miss Read, gave her a woman's welcome and took her in to dinner.

An hour later Miss March was holding an informal reception upon the veranda and everyone was crowding around to point out the beauties of the scene stretched before them in such splendid pageant, for it seemed she was in ecstasies over the glory of the sunset.

Lockwood and Quincy, like two rivals, were striving to attract her attention, but she turned from them both and asked quaintly, "Won't some one please introduce me to that Mr. Caspar?"

It was such a pointed remark that everyone laughed, for Caspar was near at hand, only as usual he was not talking any nor making himself prominent. Everyone knew he was bashful, save the young lady.

Even behind his heavy beard he blushed, and spoke almost rudely. "You have made a mistake," he stammered, "my name is Rhodes, it is my first name that is Caspar."

How could any woman be anything but embarrassed after such a blunt speech as that? But cleverly she changed the subject by asking about the odd little building across the road. "What is it?" she exclaimed, "it looks so primitive, and interesting, just as if it belonged in a Dutch painting."

The smiles of the women were pleasant to see as Mrs. Mackintosh made answer. "That is our little school-house church, Miss March, where we are trying to do

something for the children. Miss Read teaches weekdays in it and we have Sunday School there and festivals at Christmas — Maybe you would be willing to help us? ”

What was the use of Lockwood's remaining any longer? He realized that he had failed to make any impression on Miss March. Over his pasty-white face there came a forbidding frown and he started downstairs to the men below.

Dow greeted him scornfully. “What are we goin' to do, hey? By God, Barry, if you don't help us out we'll go and tell her it was you did the whole business.”

“Start the games, at once,” advised Lockwood sagely, “have the Cornishmen ready to sing ‘Sweet Genevieve’ and ‘Then You'll Remember Me,’ and have the fellows with the fiddle and the guitar to play under her window to-night. She'll like that, I know — all women do.”

“Yes, that's all right enough,” returned Dow, “but we want to apologize right away.”

A shadow of a man was listening to them intently. His fever-bright eyes seemingly burning in their sockets, he was so thin and wan. It was Ezra Watson.

“Go around, Ezra, and get them ready,” said Lockwood, “I'll show you how to apologize, all right.” Dow and Watson soon passed the word around and the men gathered in a bunch in front of the veranda. Miss March and the women were still talking about the festivities that might be gotten up for the children. They heard her distinctly saying that she knew she was going to like it in Boulder Camp.

Lockwood chose this moment to begin an address of

welcome, assuring the newcomer that it was a proud day for Boulder Camp when she came into their midst. He finished by saying, "Now, there, boys! Three cheers for Miss March, the new bookkeeper!" And they were given with a will.

"Now, get Caspar and we'll start the games," exclaimed Lockwood eagerly.

"He won't come," said Dow moodily. "He says there's no reason why he should make a holy show of himself just to please your taste for theatricals."

"Well, we'll get along without him — damn him." Lockwood was furious. For he knew there could be no games with Caspar left out.

Harris and Caspar Rhodes passed by at that moment bound for the office of the Lumber Company. Barry stopped them and told what he thought of a man who wouldn't help out at such a time.

Martin smiled sarcastically. "Go ahead and make yourself agreeable to the new bookkeeper. But don't ask us to help you. This is a new deal all around. And may the best man win."

Diantha March was looking down from the porch at the men below.

"Why, what is the matter?" she exclaimed. "Why is Mr. Lockwood so angry — and that Mr. Caspar, too?"

"Never mind the men, Miss March," said Mrs. Mackintosh, "there's been bad blood between them for a long time — and of course — *now*," she added meaningly, "it will be even worse."

While Diantha was trying to understand this peculiar remark, the Cornishmen struck up in accord singing their

songs with rich voices, and "Sweet Genevieve" wafted out on the twilight breeze. It was most charming and she enjoyed it very much, but when they had ended, she asked in an offhand way, "What position has that Mr. Caspar — I mean — Mr. Rhodes?"

"He is engineer of the mill," was the answer.

CHAPTER VII

THE FLASH OF LOCKWOOD'S DIAMONDS

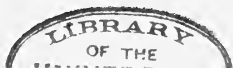
WHAT was it that Diantha saw in Caspar Rhodes to make such an impression upon her? His thick hair was like a thatch, his manner was brusque, he avoided her. All the others were bringing her flowers and singing serenades under her window and showing off to let her see how fine and splendid they were. Lockwood wanted her to go driving behind his beautiful bays, and handsome John Quincy was always hanging around trying to hear the latest news from "dear old New York."

When she went around to get subscriptions for a library for the children everyone contributed generously, except Caspar, who refused utterly. With all her arts of appeal she could make no impression on his obdurate heart.

In desperation at him at last, she gave way to her wounded feelings. "How icy! how determined! how implacable you are, Mr. Rhodes," she exclaimed, but with the tears in her eyes. And she turned away abruptly to leave him.

"Wait," he cried after her, "you have made a mistake, Miss March, I am none of those things."

She came back and looked straight into his eyes. How



darkly blue they were with heavy black fringes, but he faltered before that gaze of hers.

"If you are not," said she, very coldly, "then what are you?"

"I'm only — embarrassed," he said huskily, and walked away.

What could a woman do with a man like that, she thought as she looked after him. He was beyond her comprehension. She decided to punish him for his indifference. He should be made to appreciate the efforts she had made to further their acquaintance.

That evening on the veranda she made herself agreeable to everyone. In answer to John Quincy's questions about New York, for which he was pining, she told him the thing she missed most was attending her meetings of the Single Taxers. That started a dozen questions from Harris and Lockwood and the others gathered round.

Nothing loth, she explained the principles of her beloved Henry George to the wonderment of them all. To think a woman, young and handsome at that, should know so much about serious things. All the time she knew that Caspar was in the background and listening to every word.

While she was talking, Lockwood scanned her narrowly in his effort to understand a girl who cared nothing for horses nor driving, and could not be reached by flatteries. She was something new to his ken and he had considered himself clever in that art. He observed that her clothes were lacking in the first touch of frivolity, her hands guiltless of a gold ring even. She

was a woman — he pondered, she could not be insensible to the sparkle of jewels even though she might be panoplied against his love-making. He resolved to put her to the test.

It was a week later that he sought her out after everyone had left the veranda except John Quincy, who was trying his best to become a convert to her Single Tax theories. But it was hard work for the young man who had never tried to think in his life.

Lockwood stood till his patience was exhausted, hearing Diantha explain the same thing over to the young fellow three separate times.

“I don’t see how you can stand that cub,” he said at last in great scorn as if he were beneath contempt. “I don’t suppose you know that the rich men in New York have come to look on the West as a sort of preserve into which to turn their black sheep sons who have disgraced them, but it is a fact and Quincy here is one of them.”

Instead of resenting this as an insult Quincy only laughed in a sheepish sort of way.

“I know I was expelled,” he said frankly, “but that was because I tried to play a joke on the professor. I tied a donkey to his chair and when he came into the class room that morning he wasn’t a bit surprised because he already knew about it. Just my luck! And he told me to take my brother downstairs and to shut the door from the outside. And so, you see, the joke was on me.” His voice changed to a sort of entreaty.

“But you’re not going to think any the less of me for that, are you, Miss March? College is an awful bore.”

Diantha felt annoyed and weary of both men. She asked them to let her enjoy the sunset in peace and not bother her with their past history. John was considerate enough to take himself off, but Lockwood persisted in remaining.

Barry realized that she was annoyed and he assumed a confidential tone. "Don't be angry," he said, "I only wanted to get rid of that cub of a Quincy for I have been wanting to get in a word edgewise for days. I have been wanting to know something. What is your favorite jewel?" He smiled at her triumphantly.

"Oh, I have grand ideas," she exclaimed, "nothing less than the evening star would suit me, and a crescent moon for a tiara." Diantha always became extravagant in her language when she wanted to cover up any vague alarms. And that there was cause for fear in this man's manner, she felt instinctively.

"No, but seriously," Lockwood, continued. "You are a woman—you must have some longings, some desires. You don't care for driving—and you don't seem to care much for clothes, I must say. Maybe you prefer to invest in jewels which can be easily turned into cash. Something like this perhaps?" He tossed a purple velvet box into her lap.

She was so completely taken by surprise that she thought it must be a joke.

"Open it," he said lightly. She touched the spring, the lid flew open and two big diamonds set in a ring flashed out at her their rainbow fires.

"Very pretty," she said, indifferently. "Too bad the young lady should have broken the engagement," and

she passed the velvet box and its contents back to him.

But his small black eyes were ablaze with excitement. "It is yours," he said hoarsely.

She was so angry she was afraid she would scream out at him. She decided, however, to be more effective than that with such a creature as he was.

"Well, if it is mine," she exclaimed, "I have only one use to make of it, and that is to see if I can make it hit that post down there."

She hurled it, box and diamonds and all, down at the mark below and he was so enraged that he swore at her. Then he tried to laugh it off but she arose from her chair and stood and looked at him with her clear eyes that tried to understand what his motive might be. It was in vain, however. There was no comprehending such a man.

"What a fuss," he said with a laugh that was forced, "just because I want to give you a little present. But maybe you prefer government bonds?"

She walked past him with her queenliest manner and went within.

"I wonder," she said to herself, as she passed through the hall, "if those diamonds have anything to do with my not being able to make my books balance with the cash in the safe?"

CHAPTER VIII

THE PRICE OF A GOVERNMENT BOND

DIANTHA was puzzled. She had been studying things for several days. She had seen in the daily press a word which lingered in her mind. That word was "boodle," and it was connected with a public scandal where a gang of politicians had paid the bookkeeper of the office to go to jail for the crowd, and it was announced that after several years the big villains had got him a pardon and the creature had come out with thirty-thousand dollars to his credit. She had been horrified when first she read of it, but now, as she thought it over, she who had never known the name of fear, began to know what that sensation meant.

How did she know what sort of a gang they were in Boulder Camp? It took thousands of dollars to pay off the men and it all had to pass through her hands. How did she know but that Harris and all of them were involved in this effort to put her books in a tangle? The books were all in a boggle when she arrived and they had not been set straight yet. What did it mean?

Harris seemed to be watching her in a peculiar way. She decided to do something definite. He came to her desk and told her he was going to spend Sunday at the Junction. "Then won't you let me have the combination of the safe while you are gone?" she asked point-

edly. "As I am responsible for the money I might as well have the care of it."

He agreed to this proposition at once. "What's that?" asked Lockwood, who was always hanging around keeping his eye on everything.

"I am going to keep the combination, myself, till Monday," responded she promptly.

"That's a good idea," he remarked, knocking off the ashes from the end of his cigar.

But he scanned her with half-closed eyes.

It was Saturday and she was very busy, so that she decided to retire early to her own room after dinner. Lockwood was wandering about uneasily on the veranda and in the halls of the tavern until the men began to joke him and to ask if he had lost anything. Little Tommy was about, playing as usual and presently he began to bribe the child with candies to come and sit on his knee. "What's that you've got?" he asked. "Why, it's 'Jack the Giant Killer.'" And presently he took the child into the hall and bade him go in and see Miss March and hide his book under the bed for a joke.

"And don't let her see you do it," he explained.

"Nope," said Tommy all sticky sweet, and fond of doing mischievous things as all small animals are.

So it came to pass that as Diantha was about to undo her hair for the night, there came a childish thumping on the door and Tommy poked his cherub-head into the space and said he wanted to get in. He squeezed in past her and danced about the room and finally crawled under the bed.

He screamed and made a terrible time as she dragged

him out, which brought his mother to the rescue and finally he was carried away as a very much injured innocent.

Fairly worn out with the struggle Diantha was glad to retire. The day before, she had passed Caspar in the hall and to make conversation had asked him how far it was to Mount Granite, as she was thinking to have a climb up its rocky height. But he had told her it was too far for her to walk, as it was twelve miles, and she had said she was a Canadian and not afraid of twelve miles. She was wondering if it would not be a good thing to show him what she could do in the way of walking. Besides it would get her away from Lockwood and Quincy and all of them. She had a feeling she would like to be alone for about twenty-four hours.

Diantha was fond of poetry and a line came to her mind from the book she had been reading.

“’Tis great — ’tis great to be alone.”

“That’s just it,” she said to herself “it’s the loneliness of New York that makes it so splendid — but here you can’t get away from people without walking twelve miles.”

The next morning early she was up getting ready for her jaunt. As she sat on the floor putting on her shoes, something of a bright yellow color lying under the bed caught her attention. She drew it out and saw it was Tommy’s book. She felt something in it like a wad, and idly opened it.

The thing she saw there made her catch her breath. Mutely she sat looking at the awful sight of a bunch of

greenbacks pinned deliberately between the pages. "Maybe you prefer government bonds," came back to her memory. She counted them—yes it summed up to five-hundred, the value of a bond.

She felt herself in the toils of an unscrupulous and determined agency for her destruction.

"Is this the way they make bookkeepers into boodlers?" she asked, hardly knowing how to clear herself and almost suspicious of her own integrity. "I remember hearing of a reporter who wrote a book on 'Slow Methods of Becoming a Criminal' and I think I understand what he meant."

She sat there wrought up to the highest pitch to know what to do. "He shall not know that I found it," she said to herself—"he took it from the safe and back into the safe it shall go. How lucky! I've got the combination," but she was sobbing in joy and relief at that happy thought. "I'll put it in now, and it is so early no one will know."

No sooner said than done. She was like a child in her emotions and already full of happiness at her escape from the trap set to catch her. There might be more troubles coming but she was safe that day, and she meant to enjoy her freedom out on that splendid old frowning mountain. What were twelve miles to her!

CHAPTER IX

DIANTHA ASCENDS A MOUNTAIN AND CROSSES A RIVER

IT was a splendid outburst of feeling that carried Diantha along on that bright Sabbath morning toward the object of her desires. Before she reached it an old rancher came along and gave her a lift in his old wagon and carried her across the river, so that nothing obstructed her will or her body in having her own way freely and completely. She forgot she had to go back, she only thought of going on and on in the beautiful world she found herself roving in. The smell of the pines was exhilaration, and the green and the blue and the white of the earth and the sky and the mountain simply filled her soul with delight.

She ate her lunch at a turn in the road that led up to the great shoulder-of-earth, and then began the ascent. She had not minded the walking up to this point, but slowly it crept over her that she was not getting on very well.

The increasing altitude began to affect her. She made a brave attempt to give forth a great shout, out there all alone with no one to hear, as she had promised herself. And then as her voice seemed faint she began to wonder if things were not a little strange. She saw the sun's rays were slanting and found by her watch it was four o'clock.

Then it was she came to her senses and began to won-

der how she was going to get home before night. A cold breeze began to pierce her through from the snow-banks above. Then it became cloudy, and as she hastened down rapidly she found herself going lame from weariness.

She did not dare to rest, however, with the darkness coming down so fast and presently she could no longer see the trail.

To give herself new courage she began to halloo. Then it seemed something wonderful had happened; for there actually came back an answer. It thrilled her to think of somebody beside herself being in that vast place of silence. Presently it struck her poignantly that the increasing sounds that sharply cut the night were not human outcries but the baying of wolves. She knew the sound from her early childhood. She found that having been in the city so long had taken away her zest for such an experience as this. She had never known before how weak and human she was in the face of nature, she who had often bragged that she had been reared in the lair of the wild beasts.

Her eyes searching for signs of the trail, were caught by the sight of a piece of white paper lying by a rock. Her heart beat with hope, for she recognized it as one she had flung away after eating her lunch. She made her way slowly, yet forward, and then began to wonder how she was going to get across the river which held her from the road to Boulder.

She was deciding that she would have to camp there all night, when she heard a cry that seemed to her to be different from that of the wild coyotes in the distance

—it seemed nearer and more articulate. She listened intently. “Halloo,” sounded distinctly. Instinctively she made response, and then repented of it, lest it might be some tramp.

Then she kept quiet for a while, until she heard the reassuring words “Where — are — you?” and somehow there was a quality in the voice that gave her confidence. She made answer again and again, and finally a man’s form emerged from the shadows of the night.

“Whatever possessed you to do such a foolhardy thing?” was the first thing the man said to her.

She was feeling so happy, however, to see some one there in all that gloom that she only laughed in return.

“You are more bother than you are worth,” he continued. She thought it simply heavenly to meet a human being old enough and brave enough to be able to look out for her in that wilderness and she did not care how much he scolded. She merely asked him very mildly, how it was that he had happened to come.

He told her Mrs. Mackintosh had come to him at about five o’clock to know what to do about her absence, and he had guessed where she was, and the returning old rancher had corroborated it, and he had started out on his horse at once. “But unfortunately,” he added, “my horse has gone lame. There was nothing to do but tie him to a tree by the roadside, and I came on, thinking to find you by the riverside. But there was no sign of you, so I came across,” and his voice sounded as if he disapproved of her generally.

“I am so glad,” she said meekly. At this moment the coyotes burst into a weird howl as if in derision, and in

spite of herself, as he turned to lead the way back to the river, she seized hold of his coat. The wild beasts sounded so near and she was afraid two or three of those long paces of his would carry him out of sight and reach. "I hope you don't mind," she said, faintly.

"Hang on," he said briefly, and thus they came to the bank of the stream. There he stopped and said abruptly, "But how are you going to get across is the question."

She said something about wishing she had wings so she could fly over, but he never relaxed from that severity of his. He said that the current was swift only in the center, but that it was so full of rocks that that alone made it impossible for her to wade it as he had done.

"Perhaps I could carry you over?" he said.

"Oh, no, not at all," she spoke up with alacrity. "You go home and I'll stay here. I'm not afraid now."

"Such nonsense!" he exclaimed.

A faint drizzle filled the air. As he went down to the bank and told her to follow, she felt as if the world were coming to an end and she was so footsore and weary she did not much care. He stepped off into the water, and turned around to her as she stood on the bank and, without a word, he put his strong arms around her as if she were a helpless child. Then he lifted her, saying, "Put your arms around my neck and hold tight."

Then into the dark water, he made his way forward. There was something so bewildering about it all, that she said to herself, "I am dreaming, that's what it is." But there she was with her arm about his neck and being "toted" over the river like a baby. That she, Diantha March, should live to see herself in such a situation, such

a predicament, such a part as that, was past belief, she thought to herself.

He almost stumbled once; it was in the center, where the current was swishing about them, and the depth was up above his knees. She held her breath and tried not to clinch too tight and thought a thousand thoughts, enough to last a lifetime. All at once she remembered Grania, who was carried over the River Shannon by her lover, Diarmid, in the legendary days, as told her by her dear old grandmother, and she felt a glamour stealing over her it was hard to resist. His breath was on her cheek and it was as sweet as a girl's. He regained his balance and went on steadily.

She thought to herself that if they both had fallen into a hole in the treacherous depth of that mountain stream, then and there, and had been drowned together, well — and she drew a full breath, it would have been a sweet death to die. He was so free from the horrid usual concomitants of a man, she told herself, that he was actually inviting. There was no vinous breath, no stale tobacco-odor, nothing but just the sweetness of a man newly born upon him. And she was so grateful to him, and so dependent upon his strength, and it was so dangerous with the current's cold swish below, that everything made her forget that she was not a child at that moment.

Yet vaguely she wondered to herself why it was that a woman or a child even should think that a kiss could pay for things as well or better than a coin of the realm. Especially why such a thought as that should have been suggested to her who had never kissed any man outside of her kin. But the idea was almost irresistible, as she

felt his breath coming fast, and his heart beating in strong sledge-hammer thumps, with the tremendous energy he was putting forth to bear her across the treacherous waters below, in safety.

It seemed to her she had lived a lifetime, when finally he had reached the opposite bank and set her again upon the ground.

"If it hadn't been for that rock rolling over in the center," said he, "I think I could have gotten you over perfectly dry."

She felt in a dream more than ever, for it had been the boast of Diarmid that he had carried Grania over without so much as dampening the hem of her robe. She came to her senses and realized that her feet were a little cold, yes, they were even dripping with water, but she had not noticed it before.

He leaned over and wrung out some of the water from his trouser's legs and then led the way to the road. It grew darker all the time, but they just jogged along in silence at first. After a while he asked almost impatiently, "Why did you do such a fool thing?"

And his voice sounded like music in her ears. So she told him how she had wanted to be alone, how tired she had become of seeing so many people all about her, packed in tight in the New York flats, like living sardines, and all about her bachelor-girl friends of Pleiades Court in New York—as they went walking along the dark road, with the derisive howls of the coyotes punctuating the night, and the hoot of an owl adding its weirdness to the hour. He seemed interested, and so she told him about the Henry George meetings in the sum-

mer, in Madison Square, and how they walked through the streets in the twilight without any hats on, and attended their meetings as other people did their churches.

He seemed surprised at this item, for he was not aware that the author of "Progress and Poverty" was taken so seriously as all that. Then she told him about how she had left home and gone to Boston, and what an admirable man her father was, and many other things.

He told her about his mother, and how he had given up going to college when his father had died, and similar bits of great interest to her.

She felt that she had never had a more delightful talk with anyone in her life, in spite of her blistered feet, which were also wet and by now a mass of mud. They came to where the horse had been tethered, and he insisted on her getting on while he led him. But she only stayed on for a short rest, for the animal limped so she feared he would stumble and fall with her.

So on they went, till the hour of dawn began to illumine the heavens, and by this time she was hanging on to his arm and merely dragging her feet after her. After the sun began to appear in a chariot of red and purple clouds, he told her that they should not have more than a couple of miles further to go, and then they relapsed into a furious silence—saying nothing but thinking thousands of things. Suddenly he said, "I suppose you will be prepared for what is to follow?"

She told him she doubtless would have a bad cold. He said, "You must be very simple—" and then left it unfinished. She began to get uncomfortable. He went

on and asked if she had never read "The Mill on the Floss."

"Of course, I have," she replied, a little worried, "Maggie Tulliver is a great favorite of mine."

"Well, we shall have to be cleverer than Maggie was," he said, presently. He looked at his watch. "At the present rate we are going, we shall arrive at the camp about five o'clock. There are some mean folks in our town, as well as there were in Maggie's village, so we may as well get ready for them beforehand."

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"Well, I shall say we are engaged to be married, and in a couple of weeks you can break it off."

She thought to herself that he said it as coolly as if he had remarked, "I will pass you the cucumbers."

"But — you don't want, to — marry?" she said stupidly.

"Of course not, I can't afford it," he made reply, and then he added in what seemed to her the most peculiar way, as if significant of a thousand things, "besides —"

While she was trying to understand what this might possibly mean, there came a sound of tramping hoofs down the road, and presently appeared three men on horseback on a search for them. Then with John Quincy driving, followed a double-seated rig, in which to place them when found. Mrs. Mackintosh could keep the secret no longer and had sent them out to their assistance. In an instant, John was on the ground to give Diantha a lift into the vehicle, and the three men had

sprung to his assistance, holding the bridles of their horses about their left arms.

They were all waved away, however, by "that man," as Diantha called him.

"Miss March is my affianced wife," said he, as calm as ice, "I claim the privilege—" and he lifted her up with a great strong swing that made her feel as if she were a child in his arms, in spite of her weight of a hundred and thirty pounds.

"Oh, now, I call that a shame!" exclaimed handsome John Quincy, impulsively. "The idea of you walking off like that with Miss March while the rest of us were trying to break the ice gradually! I never gave you credit for being such a bold one as all that, Caspar!"

"Still waters run deep," spoke one of the horsemen, sententiously.

As for Diantha, she had to restrain her desire to laugh at everybody hysterically, and took refuge in the first thought that came into her head. "So lovely of you all to come out to find us, and give us such a welcome home. You can never know how grateful I am."

"A regular bridal procession," said old Dow, dryly,

John Quincy went on with more of his demurrings, under cover of which Diantha spoke briefly to the man by her side, whose face was turned to the front and not to her at all.

"Tell me quick, what sort of a man is that Lockwood?"

"An inveterate gambler," he replied.

"And Harris?"

"As good a man as breathes."

As they drove up in front of the tavern Mrs. Mackintosh greeted her most sympathetically, and carried her off and put her to bed, where she remained for two days. She spent the time thinking to herself, "I was never so happy in my whole life and I was never so miserable. What did Caspar mean when he said, 'besides?' Was it because he has to support his mother or did he mean that when it came to marrying he had some one else in mind?"

CHAPTER X

EVERTON IS IN EARNEST

SOMETHING had happened to Stanley Everton. A new idea had entered his brain giving a new pulsation to his heart, as if there were an element like wine in his veins. All else beside that new idea paled into insignificance. He found the pessimistic epigrams of Colonel Quincy palling upon him, the tart sayings of old Lockwood jarring upon his nerves.

His discontent increased until he found himself ringing the bell of the gold-and-white apartment where dwelt his old-time friend, Howard Rose, and his dark-haired wife, Vivian, celebrated for her beautiful singing voice.

She met him delightfully, and told him all the news of Diantha as told her by the "Pleiades girls." "They say Diantha has met her fate out there," she announced to him as if much amused. "As if anybody could be good enough for our Diantha, even if he is a Hercules."

"True enough," said Everton, more troubled than before.

Later the two men strolled out together and in his perturbed state of mind Everton took his friend into his confidence and told him the whole story of his conversation with Miss March and of the compact into which they had entered.

"I should not have let her go," he said determinedly,

“that was my mistake. But I hadn’t the faintest idea that she would find anybody out there worth speaking to for three minutes, but from the letters I have received and the way the girls seem to be taking it, it would appear that this fellow who poses as a sort of local Hercules is having it all his own way. I don’t like it, and I’m not going to stand for it. Diantha belongs to me by right of priority and I’m going to have her.”

Like himself, Howard Rose was also a New Yorker by adoption and he loved a battle of any kind. He was a man of few words, however, when he came to express himself, so he only smiled and said, “Why don’t you go out there and beat him at his own game?”

“That’s not a bad idea,” returned Everton, musingly. “But I wonder if there isn’t something else I can do besides that, something that Miss March would like? How would it do to send out a library for the queer little schoolhouse church she tells about? And how about these girl friends of hers, of Pleiades Court, Colleen and the others? Couldn’t I do something for them?”

“Why, of course! Let them have the fun of selecting the library,” suggested Howard, “and give the whole bunch an automobile ride and a dinner with Vivian to chaperone them. Diantha will be sure to hear of it all right.”

“Yes, that’s a good pointer,” said Everton, still in a brown study, “and what about that Henry George business they all are so interested in, how would it do if I went with them to some of those Single Tax meetings?”

Howard looked at him in deep amazement. "Why, Stanley, old man, you must be in earnest!"

"In earnest?" he repeated fiercely, "I never was so determined to win a bet before in all my life!"

CHAPTER XI

MOONLIGHT BENEATH THE PINES

FOR the life of her, Diantha March could never remember how she managed to get through the next four weeks after her mountain-tramp all night with Caspar Rhodes.

First of all there was her reckoning with Barry Lockwood. She could never forget that morning with the hoarse roar of the sawmill sounding in her ears, when he came and stood by her desk with a derisive smile on his pasty-white face.

"Well?" was all he said.

She looked upon him as a kind of madman and therefore knew she should be compelled to fall back upon all her woman's wit and cleverness to avoid a scene with him.

"Oh," she said as quietly as she could possibly manage it, "you want to know what has become of the money you were so good as to lend to the firm, till the missing money turns up? It's all right, I put it back into the safe, and Mr. Harris quite approves — don't you, Mr. Harris?"

At this Harris came forward and expressed himself as satisfied, but he was very pale and watchful of Lockwood, holding one of his crutches in his hand like a weapon to be used for striking.

"You think you're damned smart! don't you? but you'll find it don't pay, my lady!" exclaimed Barry through closed teeth in his baffled rage. "What kind of a bookkeeper are you, any way?"

She took up one of her business-cards from the desk and passed it to him. It contained her name with three initials after it. He pretended he did not understand.

"Diantha March, C. P. A.," he exclaimed scornfully. "What's that?"

"That is my card," she said with all her power of self-control, "it tells you the kind of a bookkeeper I am, a Chartered Public Accountant. I won the title from a college in New York City."

He seemed to realize that she was beyond his comprehension.

As he turned to leave the office beaten for the first time in his life in having his own way, he gave her a final shot.

"Miss March, I give you warning! people who live in glass houses can't afford to make enemies. Just think that over, will you?"

When he had departed she turned to Harris.

"Something will have to be done, Mr. Harris, I can't go on like this," she said quietly. "What's the reason that brute is allowed to go on the way he is doing?"

"Because of the influence he has; his uncle keeps him here."

"But not if he knew he was stealing the cash from the safe," she exclaimed. "I know old Horace J. well enough for that. Why, the old man is a miser."

"And the nephew is a degenerate," added Harris.

"I don't see how you have stood it," she said looking at Harris kindly. "We'll have to send for Burns to come out and give him a private report for Mr. Everton. He's the one that will see to it. Do you know Mr. Everton?"

"Only by name and hearsay," replied Harris.

"He is one of the most admirable men you ever met," her voice was full of enthusiasm, "why, in the office we call him 'Everybody's Friend.'"

"What a godsend you are, Miss March," spoke Martin Harris. "Maybe I'll get well now, but this thing has nearly eaten the heart out of me."

"When you are dealing with a madman," said she sagely, "you are justified in saying anything and doing anything to prevent bloodshed. Now, we'll have to ask Burns to be sent out for some other reason than the real one. What can it be?"

"Why, there has been some talk about putting in an electric plant, and I had hoped they would, because it would give Caspar a chance."

"Oh, Caspar!" she exclaimed.

"You know he's pretty poor because he has to support four people on what he gets, that's why he couldn't give you anything for the library."

"Oh, well! then you write for Burns to be sent out to look into the matter and I will, too. By the way, Mr. Harris, that last remark of Mr. Lockwood's refers to something, I suppose, about Caspar—and me?"

"I am afraid it does, Miss March—but don't be troubled—everyone knows Caspar is the soul of honor."

Later in the day Diantha had a talk with Mrs. Mackintosh and conveyed to her as delicately as possible that although she dressed plainly she received a good salary from the company equal to that of any man, and also that she taught in the night-school in New York in the winter and received for that another one hundred a month—and that she tried to be forehanded and thrifty.

The good woman gazed upon her with admiration. “Well, then, Miss March, you are much better off than Caspar is. I don’t think he has any idea of it.”

“No, of course he hasn’t,” said Diantha meaningly, “and he thinks he is too poor to marry—he only became engaged to me from a sense of duty and he expects me to break it off as soon as everyone gets through talking about our tramp the other night.”

“If it had been anyone but Caspar,” said Mrs. Mackintosh severely, “I could have understood it. But there is no need for any girl to have to marry Caspar even if she has been compelled to be out all night with him. That was why I chose him to go after you, because I knew he was a perfect gentleman, and I could trust him, as I could myself. Why, that man has never kissed a girl yet! That’s what they all say.”

Diantha steadied herself. It was true then. He was the Parsifal of her dreams, the pure and unsullied being she had come so far to find.

She wanted to make it easy for him to be engaged to her, and this was why she had spoken, but it was all in vain. After her talk with Mrs. Mackintosh, Caspar hardly spoke to her at all on the veranda in the evenings.

He made only a few remarks and excused himself early and retired leaving her in an agony of doubt.

At last she received a note from him saying that he thought she might as well break off the pretended engagement as it was no longer a matter of talk in the town and there was no need to keep it up any further.

The same mail brought her a letter from her friend Colleen, telling her all the wonderful things Mr. Everton was doing, about their selecting the library and the rides and pleasures he had given them, and also about his actually attending the Single Tax meetings.

She stood meditating in the middle of the floor.

"Well, I can almost understand how it was that Elizabeth loved that wicked Tannhäuser of hers," she announced in her impatience. "It was because he had so many arts at his command that he knew how to flatter and please a woman while Wolfram was encased in a wall of stone in spite of all his many virtues and splendors."

Why did Caspar act so peculiarly?

She brought to mind the description of a painting one of the Pleiades girls had seen at The Paris Exposition.

It was that of a girl standing in a wheat field and by her side was a grand knight in armor, with a bunch of red plumes rising above his helmet and he was ten feet tall and the girl loved him madly. But the fact was made plain in the painting that no one was really there beside her, glancing down with love in his eyes at her. He was transparent, so one could see the wheat stalks through him and was only the figment of her imagination.

It occurred to her that maybe she was like the girl in the wheat field. She was all mistaken some way in thinking that Caspar really cared for her behind all that brusque manner of his. But how could she be so deceived. She had thought it was his poverty alone that stood between them and so had contrived to have Mrs. Mackintosh smooth away this difficulty by telling him of her own prosperity. But here he was actually persuading her it was time to break the engagement.

"What can one do with a man like that?" she exclaimed, "he doesn't want to marry me, even if I am better off than he is — why! maybe that is what is the matter!" She put her hand to her brow, as it flashed over her that Caspar was not civilized enough to want to marry a woman because she was well off, on the contrary he doubtless scorned such a thought.

When Mrs. Mackintosh had told him of her little prosperity it had only made an obstacle between them instead of helping matters any. She wondered how she could have been so crude and so lacking as not to have understood him better.

"It has only taken five years in New York to make me forget how a true man feels on such a proposition as that. I am afraid I am losing my own sense of delicacy — and getting a little — hardened — hardened."

She thought of Mr. Everton then and wondered if she might not appear to Caspar as Mr. Everton had appeared to her.

She hastened to assure herself that she was not hardened, that she had only made a mistake and resolved that she would not allow such a thing as this to

come between her and Caspar. Her heart cried out fiercely against such a working of fate as losing him now that she had found him. She would do anything, make any sacrifice of her pride to have him say, "I love you."

She had said that when one is dealing with a madman one was justified in saying or doing anything to prevent bloodshed. "And also to prevent heartbreak," she assured herself. "It is noble of Caspar to have such high ideas and I wouldn't have him otherwise, but"—and she shook her head, "it is a kind of madness to let poverty on his part and prosperity on my part stand between us two. I am too sensible, I will do something, something to remove that idea from his brain and then see if he has a heart after all!"

That evening on the veranda she managed to make them all confess how many brothers and sisters there were in the family of each and then she announced she could beat them all, in that she was the youngest of twelve and the luckiest one of the flock, adding indifferently, "That was why I left Canada for New York; it needed somebody to get a little prosperity in the home-place."

And then she turned her head and looked straight into Caspar's blue eyes and saw the kindling of a new flame in their depths.

"Don't you think so, Mr. Rhodes?" she said insistently, and he gave her a quick little nod.

She had conveyed to him as cleverly as was possible the information she had desired to impart, that in spite of her fine salary she had so much to do for others

dependent upon her that she had only enough left for her absolute needs. And she saw that he understood.

Presently she rose to go within, and instead of giving her his usual chilly good night, he begged her to take a little walk with him in the moonlight. As she took his arm and walked along the moonlit road, up and down, in and out of the clump of sweet-smelling pines, she could feel that he was laboring under a great excitement.

After a long silence, he said in a strangely hushed tone, "As long as it is for the last time — I may — as well—" and then he broke off abruptly.

"May as well — what?" she said lightly as if it were nothing serious, but his blue eyes looked straight into hers for the first time, and she felt a great joy stealing into her heart. He was not ten feet high, nor did he wear a bunch of red plumes on the top of his helmet, yet she knew she was the girl in the wheat field.

"Explain," he said. But they walked up and down and speech hardly seemed necessary. "I feel that the moment has come," he ventured at last, "when you may break our — engagement with perfect safety — as the incident of a few weeks ago — or is it — years — ago — should be forgotten by now, and we need not keep up this pretence any longer. At the same time, however, I feel that I must explain — something" — and his voice grew husky.

"I am so glad," she said, "I thought you had something to explain."

"Oh, did you? Well, that makes it easier, of course.

Now that we are to dissolve this — partnership. Shall I call it a partnership?"

She agreed she liked the term very well.

"Now that we are to dissolve it," he repeated, "it will be no harm to tell you that this has been a very difficult role for me to play, because I have feared all the time that you would think I might be taking advantage of it, taking advantage of the circumstances, I mean — so that while I have been acting in a friendly way to make others believe we were engaged, at the same time, I have also been acting in a distant way to you, so as not to appear — too presumptuous."

She agreed that it was something like that.

"And another thing has troubled me very much," he continued, and she could feel his arm trembling with suppressed emotion where her fingers touched it lightly, "Mrs. Mackintosh intimated that you are well off and that added to my perplexity, for I feared you might suspect I had entrapped you — into this — partnership of — of ours — in some way." And then he burst out into a perfect tumult of feeling in such contrast to the measured sentences of the instant before, that she was almost alarmed as he went on to say that he could not stand it to be misunderstood like that for a moment. And that he had never been so thankful in his life as to hear that she was one of twelve children, and had to help her family.

"For now I can act myself," he exclaimed eagerly, "and let you know the whole truth, now that I know you have responsibilities to others, the same as I have,

and that it will not be taking advantage of the circumstances — seeing now that they no longer exist.”

He saw reflected in her face a something of the wildness of his own, and calmed down suddenly. “I hope I have not alarmed you — for that would be too bad,” and he laughed.

Diantha’s brain was in a tumult. What had he been saying? She couldn’t for the life of her tell, only that the partnership was dissolved and he was very much relieved. But the look in his eyes did not go with the words.

“Of course, when any one has duties to others, they take precedence over any personal feeling one may have,” he went on, more calmly, “but that inexorable fact cannot prevent one from having personal feelings, however much one tries. And though I am in duty bound to step to one side and go from your life — forever — O Miss March!” he took her hand in his and held it an instant, “I want you to know that I have never been so happy and yet so miserable in all my life as I have been since I first met you.”

It was no figment of her imagination. Her knight stood by her side.

He was very much embarrassed then and so was she. She could not speak. She did not know why they had to part forever, and she did not care. It was enough to her that she knew he was real, and that she had heard him speak these words. “Happy and miserable? Yes, that is what love means, undoubtedly,” she thought to herself; for that was the way she had been feeling, too, all the time of their partnership.

"Now that it is all over," he said, "I want you to know that I have never known any one like you in my life, so clever, so bright, so beautiful and so good."

She had to laugh at that, and assured him he must be making fun of her. But he said no, he meant it, and then begged her to forgive him for appearing so ungenerous about refusing to help out on the Sunday School fund for the reason that he had to be just, before he could afford to be generous; that he had to help his family first.

Diantha was so happy that she did not care if he had a thousand brothers, sisters, mothers, and aunts to support. She rejoiced to think that here by her side was a man after her own heart, even if they did have to part forever. She was so glad that there was one such man left in the whole world, that it renewed her faith in mankind generally.

Mr. Everton had been mistaken when he had said that there were no innocent men in the world, that they were all alike. She had proved it.

Caspar was noble and high-minded as any Parsifal, as any Wolfram. He believed that duty came first — that she was involved in the needs of her family as he was himself in his, he accepted the inevitable patiently, yet must let her know that she was dear to him. That was enough for one night.

They walked up and down in the splendid silver of the moonlight, unaware of the world in general, until some coarse creature thrust himself upon their notice by speaking out most rudely. Diantha had been so absorbed in what Caspar was saying that she did not catch

the words, but there was a raucous laugh that brought her to her senses.

"I am afraid it was Lockwood," said Caspar.

"But why do you say 'afraid,'" she ventured.

"Because he has been trying to pick a fight with me for some time. He has an evil tongue."

She understood. She had incurred his enmity and this was to be the revenge that he had threatened her with. She entreated Caspar not to pay any attention to him, but simply to consider the source, a gambler maddened by drink whose habits made him beneath contempt.

"A man deserves to be killed who takes a woman's name in vain," said he resolutely.

"O Caspar," she exclaimed, as the terrors of the situation dawned on her, "and have you been enduring this, too, on top of all those other troubles — for me?"

As she glanced into his face for one good look, she saw that his forehead under the thick mop of hair was almost milk-white, that his dark beard did not conceal his high cheek-bones and that the ascetic tightening of his lips, did not prevent their being as red as a woman's and that there was a spark of fire shining in his dark-blue eyes.

"I think we had better be going in," he said, "for though it is so beautiful out here in the moonlight, we know well enough that all these things have to come to an end."

CHAPTER XII

ONE DANCE WITH CASPAR

ON the announcing of the breaking of the engagement of Caspar and Diantha, John Quincy begged that Miss March would accept him for escort to the Grand Ball which was to be given at the Junction by the Woodmen, a fraternal organization of which Caspar was treasurer.

Mrs. Mackintosh urged her to do so as they were all going together in a group to have a good time.

Finding that Caspar would be there, Diantha got out her party-gown and waved her hair and burst upon them all like a butterfly fresh from its chrysalis. She would compel him to look at her.

From afar she saw him. As usual he was alone. Her heart yearned over him. What a maddening thing it was that they should be so near and yet so far. She felt she would dare every convention to have one dance with him. Yet how? A broken engagement generally left a pair at outs with each other. It would be inconsistent, it would be a cause for scandal for them to be friendly enough to dance!

She looked up to find Barry Lockwood asking for her programme. It was full already but the menace in his eyes filled her with dread. She realized that he meant to make trouble.

"Don't be worried, Miss March," said Mrs. Mackintosh, "everybody knows that Barry is jealous!"

Diantha took a breath. This then was the way it appeared to the people of Boulder. On the whole it was better to let them think so than to have them know the truth until he was uncovered and cast out in all his infamy. She wondered how long it would be until Burns came out to learn what was the matter and then go back to reveal it all to Everton, who would see that justice was done and the town rid of his hated presence.

Until then she realized she would have to be very circumspect, very cautious, or the bad blood already existing between him and Caspar would have some terrible result. Yet her heart cried out that she wanted to have just one dance with Caspar and then she would be content.

She took John Quincy into her confidence and as he was always good-natured, he assented to her proposition most willingly. They went out on the floor and whirled around the room several times, and then as they reached the door, where was one standing in rather somber mood, John released her and said promptly, "Well, Caspar, here's your chance!"

A brilliant light came into his blue eyes as he smiled at her, but there came a tremble about his lip as if he were trying to control himself. "How do you know whether I can dance or not?"

"I don't care whether you can or not!" she said eagerly, "but I can't endure it to see you here all alone while I am having such a good time."

He put his arm about her waist gently, and swung out with that strong impetus that made her feel he was a natural waltzer, slow and steady and measured like the beat of a pendulum. It was not the latest step like John's, but plain and masterful like a strong heart-beat in its systole and diastole. She was so happy; only she knew it must come to an end, and what she was going to do then she did not know. For with that sweet breath upon her cheek she thought again of the night when he had carried her over the dark river, and she longed to be free from conventions and other people and customs and manners so she might shake off the whole world and be with him alone.

She was rudely awakened from her thoughts by someone getting in the way and pushing against them and throwing them out of balance.

She saw the smiling white face of Lockwood with its red-lidded eyes. She heard the insulting words of familiarity with which he addressed her in the presence of Caspar to enrage him and bring about a miserable scene there before every one. This was to be his revenge for her guarding the safe from his infamous schemes.

"Nobody pays any attention to a drunken man's insults," she said quickly, noting the suppressed rage in Caspar's eyes. "Take me to Mrs. Mackintosh at once."

"I should have thrashed him a week ago," said Caspar, hoarsely.

"It is all my fault," she said, "I shouldn't have

danced with you. I implore you to let it pass. That man is at my mercy — I'll see that he is punished — but just have faith in me and wait a little."

"What do you mean?" asked Caspar.

Diantha became confused and could not answer him without telling more than she wanted to reveal. So she blundered from one poor explanation to another.

There came a puzzlement into Caspar's blue eye. "I should be sorry for you if you got mixed up in any way. You may not know it, but some people cannot resist Lockwood."

"Well, I can!" she cried, "I simply abominate him."

But everything was changed between them. He left her with Mrs. Mackintosh without another word.

Diantha knew she was standing on the brink of a precipice. Barry Lockwood had given her to understand, with the most devilish subtlety, there was no failing to comprehend that it was a higher price than mere money he was demanding now, a more poignant bribe he was offering her to relax her vigilance over the safe and the books — it was the life of the man she loved.

He would keep on with his insults until Caspar could stand no more and when in his enraged manhood he should strike the first blow with his fist, Lockwood would shoot him through the heart. The malignity of the thing drove her nearly mad. If only she could do something to gain time, gain time until Burns came out from New York! What could she do, that was the next question.

"How white and tired you are looking, Miss March," said Mrs. Mackintosh, and Diantha tried to smile at her.

The grand banquet was ready and John offered her his arm for the supper march. Every one was hearty and hungry and the feast disappeared like magic. Diantha, however, was in such a quandary that she did not know what she was eating, trying to face that terrible question which had to be met and at once.

All the way home in the stage she was still meditating. When they all got out and went up the steps to the tavern, Caspar passed Diantha by without a look. Lockwood smiled at her in his derisive way and took off his hat to her with a mocking bow.

Was this a sign to her as to the course to follow?

She went up to him boldly and spoke for all to hear.

"I hope you are happy, Mr. Lockwood, over your night's work," she said, clearly and distinctly. "I hope it is a pleasure to you to know that Mr. Rhodes and I have quarrelled over you."

CHAPTER XIII

DEALING WITH A MADMAN

IT was the next day, with Tommy by the hand, that Diantha made it convenient to meet Lockwood on the stairs.

"Oh, won't you take us to the field to see the calves," she said. "Ever since the bull tossed Tommy's dog he's afraid to go, and so am I without someone to protect me."

Barry looked nonplussed.

"You'd really like me to take you to see the calves?"

"If you will be so kind!" She was shivering at contact with him but steadied herself to bear looking into his small black eyes and enduring his glance in return.

As they left the front of the tavern and went down the road, the child put one chubby hand into Lockwood's on the one side and into Diantha's on the other, in that confiding way which is so delightfully irresistible in the young of the human species.

"Tommy seems very fond of you, Mr. Lockwood," she said pleasantly. "They say that any man who attracts children must have a good spot in his heart, however he may appear to others."

Lockwood gave a scornful laugh at that remark. "Oh, I don't take any stock in that kind of talk!"

Neither did Diantha. She knew Tommy would walk off with a thug for a peppermint-drop. But it made a beginning.

Diantha could feel the man's eyes fixed on her face and at last he spoke. "Say—what are you after, Miss March?"

She tried but could not think what to reply.

"I know there is no love lost between us, and if you have any notion of making up to me at the eleventh hour—I want you to understand it is too late."

"I am only going to ask you for your friendship, Mr. Lockwood," said Diantha, bravely, "I am going to confide to you something no one else knows. I am going back to New York—I didn't come to stay—but if only you would—let me have your friendship till I go—I should be very grateful. I am sure you can be very pleasant when you want to be—judging by Tommy's affection for you—and it would be such a relief for the little time more I am going to stay. If we could be friends—till then."

Her voice died away. It was not easy to talk to a madman. Nevertheless she held out her hand to the unpleasant man before her, as one would act a part and act it well while about it in the determination to avert a tragedy, even at the sacrifice of one's own feeling in the matter.

Lockwood made no attempt to conceal the fact that he was pleased with her confidence. He gave her a more softened glance, took her hand and held it longer than was necessary. She could have shuddered at the contact, she loathed him so, but she took comfort in the

fact that she had on her gloves, which she hoped took off some of the curse.

"When do you go?" He tried not to be too eager, yet it was plain enough that the sooner the better it would be for him.

"It is not settled yet. I came out here partly for my health; I should like a few more weeks."

He was wary, yet he seemed relieved. As the three of them walked back to the tavern he assumed a more polite manner toward Diantha. But she knew him for a cad at heart, for when they reached the door, where a group of men were standing, he did not leave her to herself, as a generous foe would have done, but became loud and noisy in his attempt to blazon to all their small world that they two were now cheek-by-jowl, even after all the evil he had said of her.

She realized then that he was going to punish her for every hour of that effort of hers to obtain respite from the slanders of his evil tongue. This was the moment when she weakened. It was a big price to pay.

She felt exceedingly small and humbled as she went to her usual place on the veranda. There was John Quincy, with a visible interrogation on his face. Harris, too, seemed reproachful as he beheld her and Barry Lockwood together. Making up with the enemy is a doubtful thing to do under all circumstances. However, he made an effort and gave Barry a chair in their midst, Barry who had been tabooed tacitly by them all for the week past, in resentment against him for his slanders upon the name of Miss March.

It took a tremendous courage to bear that moment. However, Diantha remembered what she was doing it all for — to save Caspar from killing or being killed — and also to keep her safe from being robbed.

It was well she thought of him before she met his gaze; for her heart almost failed her as his dark-blue eyes met hers. She did not blame him for being chilled at sight of her in such apparent good-fellowship with that wretch. She would not have had him be otherwise. He did not even nod to her. She was beneath his contempt. She could feel his scorn filling all the air as one does the coming of an iceberg.

She did not sit crushed and silent under all this disapproval, however. She was the gayest of the gay with a merry bit of chaff for each one. On the porch, amid the group, she perceived a strange yearning look in the eyes of some one to whom she had never yet spoken, although she had noticed him on the day of her arrival in the midst of the mobbing of the coach. It was Watson, of the fever-bright eyes, the shadowy bookkeeper whose life had been ruined by Lockwood.

Diantha liked Mrs. Watson and knew she was taking in sewing to support them both since the losing of his place; a frail little woman with only a strong spirit to help her bear the burdens thrust upon her.

Diantha leaned over to him, where he was hiding in the background, and said pleasantly, "How is your wife, this evening, Mr. Watson?"

Everyone seemed surprised and Lockwood was distinctly annoyed to have this pariah brought into the con-

versation. Watson himself seemed alarmed to be so boldly addressed. However, he made reply in a subdued voice that she was feeling better.

Diantha felt a deep sympathy with this crushed being, she knew he was suffering for the sins of some one else than himself. Maybe he had been honest enough but not clever enough to escape Lockwood's deviltries? She conceived a desire to make Lockwood recognize the existence of Watson then and there. Why not?

"By the way," said she deliberately, "the new number of the fashion magazine has come and it gives some patterns for making paper-flowers. Maybe Mrs. Watson might make us some for the children's festival. Mr. Lockwood, will you kindly get the book from the table in the parlor and give it to Mr. Watson, you have no idea how pretty those flowers can be made."

She had the pleasure of seeing this done before everyone. As she beheld Watson going home, she pitied him from the bottom of her heart. Who could know so well as she what he had been compelled to endure? But she was a Public Chartered Accountant and she had to be clever as well as honest, even though it cost her the dearest thing she had in the world.

She could not resist giving one glance toward Caspar. In his self-contained wrath, he had taken on a fineness of feature and alabaster tint of color that made him very handsome. He seemed removed from her a distance greater than between her and the stars shining in the blue above.

During the next ten days that followed, Diantha was almost distracted with the role she had elected to play

to save bloodshed and also tampering with her safe. Would Burns never come? At last there came a telegram for Harris, who was now about with only one crutch.

"Coming on stage to-night," said he to her quietly.

Diantha took her place on the porch to watch for the stage, but it was with suppressed excitement; for Lockwood was close by her side. From the seat by the stage-driver someone descended, a tall man with a dark beard well trimmed, and he and Harris were shaking hands warmly.

Diantha was disappointed. It was not Burns at all. Who could it be? As she gazed on the newcomer she became puzzled.

Lockwood rose and gripped his hands fiercely. "It's someone from the Company, by all that's—I'll be damned," he muttered and then he turned on the girl suspiciously. "Own up, now! What do you know about this?"

She met his gaze calmly. "They have been talking about putting in an electrical plant—and I suppose they've sent some one out to see how much it 'll cost."

He turned on his poor shadow savagely, "Get out of here, Watson. What do you mean hanging around? Don't you understand? It's one of the Company from New York City."

An ashen hue spread over the face of poor Watson and he seemed to shrink to less than the stature of a man as he passed from sight.

Diantha was watching the scene below, gazing fascinatedly on the newly arrived stranger in whom there was

something familiar and a delightful suspicion was beginning to overwhelm her. Not until the new arrival had turned his back, however, did she feel sure that it was really and truly "Everybody's Friend," fine and splendid Mr. Everton, himself, who had come out here in answer to the entreaties of herself and Harris. Yet how? and why? He who could not bear to leave the city! What a tremendous surprise it was, yet she had to pretend it was all nothing and control her feelings, because Lockwood was there by her side.

Finally Mr. Harris appeared bringing Mr. Everton to see the splendid view from the veranda, and incidentally to introduce Lockwood.

Turning to Diantha he said, "Mr. Everton, you have probably met our bookkeeper, Miss March."

Everton bowed politely and said, "Yes, Miss March is well known to our firm as one of the finest bookkeepers in New York City."

Mrs. Mackintosh then appeared to say that dinner was ready, and they went within, leaving Diantha there with Lockwood, who was craftily listening to every word and weighing it.

"Mr. Harris is hoping they will make the change to electricity so that Caspar will be benefited, he has been studying it for some time," said the girl.

Lockwood tried to control himself and then he gave way to an outburst of fury. "If you have had any hand in this, my lady, I'll pay you for it!"

Then he pretended he had a headache that was driving him mad and that he was not responsible for what he was saying. He began asking her questions as to

how long she had known Everton and if she had any influence with him.

"You want my friendship, Miss March," he said to her finally, "now you will have to pay for it. You have got to give me something in return."

"'In return?'" she repeated slowly.

"Yes, you don't want me to insult Caspar about you for fear he will give me that sledge-hammer blow of his, and then I'll shoot him down like a dog — justifiable homicide — no law'd touch me for that! Now, I'm no fool! That's why you want to be friends. But things are not going to please me just now; I don't know whether it is your doing or not. But you have got to pay me, you have got to give me something in return for my friendship."

Diantha was very pale. She felt a chill go through her. "What — do — you ask?"

He looked at her intently for a long moment. "Your silence," he said hoarsely.

"Very well," she made reply.

He leaned forward. "Do you mean it, or are you going to play me false?"

"I mean it," she said.

"How can I know that? How can I know you won't tell Everton every damned thing that has happened since you came to Boulder? Or maybe you've already told him?" He was watching her like a snake.

"No, I have not yet told him, nor will I tell him," Diantha said, and her heart was beating so she could hardly speak.

"You're so damned clever you'd deceive the devil

himself," he responded. "Hold up your right hand." She held it up. "You promise on your honor to keep silent in return for my friendship."

"I promise on my honor," she said slowly.

He looked at her steadily. "There's something about you, I don't know what it is, but I believe you." He arose and went his way leaving her there very white and distressed.

CHAPTER XIV

DIANTHA'S RIDDLE

SHE gave a sigh of relief at last to be rid of the man's presence. And strangely enough she heard an echo to her sigh. She turned and saw it was Watson. That he was miserable was painted upon him with something stronger than pigments. She saw that he was anxious to tell her something but that speech was impossible; for his finger was on his lip as he pantomimed to her.

Then she saw he was using his fingers as children do at school to spell a message from one to the other in a dumb sort of alphabet. She watched him intently and this was the legend he was trying to convey to her understanding speechlessly. "Barry has a wife and children."

She understood at once. The poor man thought she was becoming interested in Lockwood as a sweetheart, and at any cost to himself, was resolved to save her from the misfortune and disgrace of being in love with a married man. She realized this was done in gratitude for her interest in his wife and felt touched by this little effort on his part to save her in spite of Lockwood's power over him. Some way it cheered her up and gave her new courage. As John Quincy came and sat by her side, she tried to be pleasant and forget for the moment all the painful things that oppressed her. Mr. Everton

was near at hand and she felt sure he would bring order out of chaos.

She became aware, however, that it was John who was serious this time.

"Since you broke with Caspar, Miss March, there is nobody to protect you," said he hurriedly, "and I'm going to do it, from this time on if you will give me the right."

She pretended to be amused that it should be thought necessary to have protection. He assured her that she was a very foolish girl and that she needed some man to do it for her as she did not know how to take care of herself. She tried to get him off the subject by asking him how old he was.

"I shall be twenty-one next month," he replied with dignity.

She looked at him intently, his mournful brown eyes and golden-tinted hair and beard with a long moustache, so big and handsome, like an ancient Viking, and yet only a boy after all. She thought it no wonder she had always been amused by him.

"There is no reason why you can't marry me and next week we'll go back to dear old New York. I know father would be pleased to see me bring home a wife like you."

"Your father?" she repeated with a frigid air, "What? Colonel Quincy!"

"I know I've made a fool of myself but I can improve, for I can't help loving you. A man would do almost anything to win a girl-like you, so sensible, so good and so beautiful."

These were the words that Caspar had used and when she thought how far he was removed from her now, it seemed like a mockery. She became so unstrung that she began to weep, silently but none the less with tears running down her cheeks. Poor John could not make it out but tried to comfort her by begging her to confide in him.

"You must have faith in me," she said finally, "even if I do appear to be friendly with Mr. Lockwood. I have a good reason for it, as you will see in good time. And you can tell Caspar that, if you want to," she added soberly.

"Cheer up," said John, "Harris is coming and bringing Mr. Everton out to see the last of the sunset and I guess I'll go. I don't see much to live for now." And he gave a great sigh as he turned away.

Diantha pulled herself together. The whole world seemed at cross-purposes but she would have to keep silence no matter what happened. That compact held her fast like bars of steel.

She tried to smile as Everton and Harris appeared and began to talk eagerly about the beauty of the scenes thus spread before them night after night and told how far away splendid Shasta was and all about the peak nearer at hand, and then confessed how she had tried to climb it and had failed.

"It is the time for our annual picnic to the Twin Lakes," said Harris, "which takes us to the foot of the mountain, and then it is very easy to go to the top. We might hurry it for you, Mr. Everton."

"That would be fine," he exclaimed.

"But you don't care for mountains?" Diantha remarked.

"I'm not so sure but that I do since coming here," he responded with a bright look in his eyes. He still was strange to her, like another man.

When Harris left them, Everton gave her a quick look. "Well," he said discontentedly, "I suppose you think you have found your elemental man in that long-legged, gander-heels of a John Quincy?"

"Not at all!" she cried in dismay. "Not he! not that baby-boy that believes in sea-serpents and ghosts and can't earn a dollar to save his life."

Everton's countenance took on a severe cast. "To tell the truth," he said disapprovingly, "I was hoping it was the tall fellow, but there is no accounting for tastes so I suppose it was the other one that was sitting here when I first came."

"Not at all," she said offended, "that was your crooked stick, Mr. Lockwood, a man with wife and children, and a degenerate."

There swept across his face doubt, amazement and relief, in quick succession. Then he spoke with a touch of raillery. "Oh! so there is — a third?"

Diantha hung her head abashed. "There was," she stammered, "but there is — not — now."

Harris was returning and with him was Caspar, brought to meet Everton and have a talk with him about the proposed changes to be made in the installing of an electrical plant to take the place of steam.

Diantha started to go within but Everton bade her wait a moment.

So she did as she was bid and it was not hard; for she looked at the stars coming out, and listened to Caspar's voice, which was like music to her ears. Once in a while she would take a glance at his profile and think of that night when he had carried her across the river and her arm was about his neck. And then she remembered how perilously near she had come to kissing him, out of her gratitude, and she wondered what would have happened if she had done such a thing. Doubtless he would have dropped her into the river at such an indignity as that, and her imagination having run away with her, she laughed out loud in a kind of smothered chuckle.

"What's the joke?" asked Stanley Everton pleasantly, turning to her in half surprise.

"Oh, nothing," she returned, "only you two amuse me, with all your mighty dynamos to get into trouble with."

It was a nonsensical answer, but it gave her a chance to include Caspar. Presently with a stiff inclination of his head to her, and a cordial good-night to Everton, Caspar departed.

"I congratulate you," said Everton. She assured him there was nothing to congratulate her on, but he persisted. "I like him much better than I could have thought possible," he said. She pretended to misunderstand him and said, "Mr. Harris is a very nice man."

"But I have reference to the third one," said Stanley significantly.

"How can you be so absurd," she cried, "there isn't any third, nor second nor first when it comes to that."

"Diantha," he said, and his voice trembled a little, "it is in the very air. He is a manly fellow, and I admit that I like him." He waited for her to speak, but she was thinking that Caspar might have had a little faith in her. That was the true test of love after all.

"Diantha," and he spoke it in such a gentle tone that she was touched to the heart, "you were very happy — so happy that I could feel it in the air hurtling around me just as if it were full of invisible arrows — there was something in your laughter, childishly sweet; I know all about it, I have been there." He stopped, he was thinking of the apple blossoms of his boyhood.

Diantha was amazed. "You?" she cried, "you could feel all that, you, who cherish no more illusions?"

He lifted his hand in mute protest. "That was months ago, things are different now." He seemed confused. Then he began afresh and wanted to know what was the matter with things at the office, that he had come out himself to see that things were made straight.

"Do you know, Diantha," he added, "you look to me as if you had suffered. Now what is the matter?"

Diantha heard a faint dry cough as if in warning. Who could it be but Watson who was keeping watch for his master? She felt that he wanted her to know that the less he heard the less he would have to report.

She put her finger to her lip, and pantomimed that she was not at liberty to speak. He seemed puzzled. "Can't you give me an inkling?" he said, "I am a pretty good guesser, sometimes."

Diantha looked at him intently, in her mind paraphras-

ing a verse that seemed to fit the case. "I can give you a riddle," she said.

"Riddle me, riddle me right,
Who slew my love last Saturday night?
'Twas only a word that flew like a bird,
From North to South in every one's mouth,
But that slew my love."

It was the moment for Mrs. Mackintosh to appear on the veranda, as by arrangement with Diantha, and she began talking about the two-day picnic to Granite Mountain as suggested by Mr. Harris. After some little planning it was decided to go on the following Friday and to return on Sunday.

As they were about to go within, Everton asked Diantha to repeat that riddle for his benefit. After she had done so, she said in mock-gaiety, "Now, do you think you can make that out?"

"Give me twenty-four hours," he said, and then he looked into her eyes with a strange sad look she had never beheld there before.

CHAPTER XV

THE RIGHTS OF A BABE

MRS. MACKINTOSH'S brown eyes were fixed on Diantha in deep scrutiny. "You're a lucky girl," she remarked.

"Why so?" replied Diantha, taking her copper-bright hair down and shaking it out over her shoulders like a Brunehilde, trying to cover up her feelings.

"I am jealous for Caspar," she said, loyally, "he has no chance with a fine man like that Mr. Everton."

Diantha made no response. What was the use? The warm-hearted woman went on to say she could see he was in love with her, and she as cold as ice, as if she didn't know. "It's no machinery he's after," she announced, "it's just plain; no, not plain, but handsome Miss March he's after. Whatever brought you out here to this God-forsaken place where there isn't even a church, when you can have a fine gentleman like that for the taking?"

Diantha's old grievance against Everton came back to her poignantly.

She was angered at all this praise showered on him. She burst out with her conception of him as a city-man, preserved but not alive, not fond of nature nor the things she adored. "You don't need to be jealous for

Caspar," she cried, "there is no one like him in the whole world."

"You poor dear," said Mrs. Mackintosh, sympathetically, for Diantha could not hold out any longer, and had buried her head in her arm on the bureau on top of the pin-cushion, regardless of the needles and pins. "I see that you are on speaking terms with Barry," she continued. "Under the circumstances I don't see how you could do anything else as it may shut up his foul mouth."

But the words were smothered; for Diantha had sprung up and put her arms around the good woman's neck, bare as they were, and she hung on-tight till she had nearly cut off her breath. "There! there! at last there is someone who understands," she cried in joyful sobs. "Thank God there is a woman in camp after my own heart. I shall always love you, Mrs. Mackintosh, for those words! Ellen! I shall call you Ellen from this time on and you shall call me Diantha."

"Of course I understood," she said, getting her breath back again.

"You've a strong grip, Miss Mar—" Diantha gave her a little shake to remind her that they were near and dear friends now and amid her laughing she said, "Diantha?—it's a pretty name, well suited to you—but these white arms were meant to carry a sweet baby, my dear, and not those old books of yours. What a fine son you would be having, the pride of your old age, some day, as I am hoping Tommy will be to me."

At this Diantha's tears were left to dry on her cheek as she gazed into the warm brown eyes of her new-

found friend. "Motherhood is a very serious thing," she said, thinking of Ellen's ignorance of her own child. "Of course we women all are harboring the sacred idea of receiving a man-child from the Lord as the greatest joy of life. But don't you see, Ellen, we must not leave anything to chance; we must be intelligent, we must choose what — what kind of a child we will have."

"Choose?" repeated Ellen a little troubled.

"Yes, it lies with us women to make a new breed in the world if we so choose." Diantha's eyes were shining with a holy light. "First, there is necessary a good heredity, and second, a good environment. One without the other will be of no avail; indeed the good environment is almost the more necessary of the two. If a child is in the midst of lying, swearing and cheating, how can it escape the contagion?"

"You mean that this is not a good place for Tommy," said the mother, anxiously.

Diantha thought of the bribes that were being offered to the child hourly, by the irresponsible men of the place, as well as the noxious influence of the example set by them upon a tender mind.

"When a babe comes to earth," she said slowly, "it is entitled to an innocent childhood, companioned by puppies and kittens and calves and lambs, free from stress, free from the knowledge of wars, free from the knowledge of evil. Else the poor babe has missed the only garden of Eden that earth has to give."

Ellen was gazing into her eyes steadily. "While all that is very true," she replied, "yet there is a worse evil than that. You say it lies with us women to make

a new breed in the world if we will. But you have forgotten all about the supreme importance of the mother's environment, as you call it, before the poor babe comes to earth. She should be free from stress, free from knowledge of wars, free from knowledge of evil."

"Ellen, you frighten me," murmured Diantha. She could feel that a great impulse of emotion was behind her words.

"It is my secret," said Ellen, her bosom heaving, "I have never told it to a living soul." And then hurriedly she revealed the tale of how she had married late in life, how her husband, Captain Mackintosh, had looked upon the house as he did upon a ship, a place to tyrannize over from morn till night, how he had tried to crush her will, how he had even used violence to her to make her yield, but for the sake of the child that was coming she had dared him to do his worst, saying she would rather die than to be the mother of a coward. "That's the way cowards are made," she said at the end.

Diantha sat there white with horror. "You could not have been sorry when he went?"

"It was a liberation!" said Ellen. "So you see that when a babe comes to earth, as you put it, its first right is a mother who shall be kept free from stress and evil. That is the best heredity that can be given a child, a free mother. For God sends the new little soul to her keeping, and it is she, not the father, who decides what the child shall be."

"I never thought of that before," said Diantha.

"Pampered women make degenerate children, starved women make wolfish children," said Ellen, "that is why

we get our great men from the respectable middle class, the world over. The race-suicide they are talking about is a virtue compared with producing a bad race composed of degenerates and anarchists." Her brown eyes were gleaming with the emotions stirred in her by memory.

Diantha was thinking fast and furiously. Her ideas had never carried her so far as this. Out of it all she came with a new thought. "Then, Ellen," she said, "it is the environment of the mother before the birth of the babe that counts more than anything else?"

"Yes, my dear, and that is why I am sorry to see you keeping these old books and fighting with men like Barry Lockwood, who is a bad-hearted man and wouldn't hesitate to knock you down if you got in his way, all for the sake of that poor babe that some day will be coming to find shelter in your arms."

The rights of a babe! Had she not understood them then, all this time?

Diantha forgot all about Ellen's ignorance of her own child and began to think of her own shortcomings. "I never thought of that before either," she murmured.

As they parted for the night they embraced each other fondly. "You make me think of the Alruna women in the olden times of the Kelts," said Diantha. "You are so splendidly wise! And you do believe in Caspar, don't you?"

"He is one in ten thousand," she replied, smiling. "And that Mr. Everton, he is one in ten thousand, too. You are a lucky girl either way."

But Diantha frowned, for she knew her heart was hard against him.

CHAPTER XVI

DIANTHA RIDES BEHIND CASPAR

EVERY year there was a hegira of the families of Boulder Camp to the Twin Lakes. But never was there a more glorious day than this when Diantha March and Stanley Everton, the two New Yorkers, went with them upon their joyous journey. All sorts of vehicles had been pressed into service for the women and children, while the men cavorting on old nags and serving as out-riders added to the festivity of the procession.

How beautiful the alders and cedars and pines that fringed the road and filled the mountains with grace. How delicious the air full of pine-breath! Everton had a gleam in his eyes and a smile on his lips for everything that came, he was stirred to the very heart of him by all these revelations of nature, human and earthly. Everybody was so kind and so interested in everybody else, and they all united in giving him such a friendly regard, men, women and even the little children, that he could feel his heart pounding against his side as it had not done since those early days when he had stood beneath the apple blossoms of early spring with his first love.

He had wakened as if from a long sleep to the beauty of the earth once more and to the beauty of human sympathy. How little the Sunday School library had

cost him! How great was the gift he had received in return! He had begun to perceive the world through Diantha's eyes; and it was a beautiful world.

Barry Lockwood had been hovering around, watching the preparations being made for the start, not quite decided in his mind whether to join the cavalcade or not, until he saw Diantha helping Miss Read find places in the wagons for the children, who were carrying little flags as befitted the gayety of the occasion. He looked at her critically, and saw hanging upon her wrist, the little black silk bag in which she carried a small memorandum book, the one she consulted when she wished to open the safe. He had not been watching her in vain. There was every reason to believe that the number of the combination of the safe was in that small book.

He made an effort to be less surly, to cover up his malign intentions for the moment, and put forth his most fascinating manner as he announced that he would have to join them after all.

When he returned mounted on his beautiful sorrel he caught sight of Everton talking to Diantha March. There was something so remarkable in the expression of interest on Everton's face that Lockwood was struck by it. "I'll be damned if he isn't in love with her," he ejaculated under his breath. "All the better! he may not want to marry her after—but he wouldn't let her be sent to the state's prison. They don't send women if they can help it; so nobody'll be hurt much! And this time," he took a full breath as the old fierceness for money came upon him like a terrible appetite, "it's a

big haul, and she won't tell as long as Caspar is in danger."

Lockwood fell in line beside the wagon where Diantha was riding, but he was too abstracted to be otherwise than moody.

As they all went on their way, they sang "America," but Diantha took especial pains to explain to everybody in her wagon that while the rest of them were saying, "Let Freedom Ring," she was singing, "God save the Queen"; for she would always be loyal to Canada.

Everton smiled at her patriotic ardor but said little; for he had a surprise in store for her. It was the placing of a flag upon the top of the mountain. Mrs. Mackintosh knew all about the enterprise and had arranged it so that he and John Quincy were to go off together secretly for that purpose. Therefore when the caravan arrived at the stopping-place, after the twelve miles of travel, they two escaped amid the hubbub and confusion, and left the other horsemen to do duty.

The wagons could go no further. Therefore it was part of the proceedings for the men each to take one of the women or children behind him on his horse, across the river, and over a trail, leading to the beautiful sequestered spot of earth, where the Twin Lakes lay.

Diantha and Miss Read, the school-teacher, remained to help the children up, lifting them to place. Diantha glanced up at Caspar as she gave Tommy to his care, and placed a little girl in front, but he averted his eyes as if he refused to meet her gaze after her having made friends with her arch enemy and his. She could not

resist the temptation to speak, however, for she was simply wild to sit up there on the back of that horse of his, in the little boy's place.

"Won't you come back for me," she said, "I have always wanted to ride on that horse?"

He answered in such a husky tone it was unintelligible, but she took it for disapproval and looked after him with the tears of disappointment filling her eyes, and forgetting all about the picnic and everything, until she was recalled to herself suddenly, by the voice of Lockwood, asking her if she was ready to go over. To ride over behind Lockwood was such a dread thought, she invented excuses, trying to get him to take Mrs. Watson first. But he was determined, and she saw she must face the ordeal or make a scene. What a price to pay for his friendship!

The ride over the trail which might have been so delightful if she could have gone with him whom she loved, was now converted into a horror. Unwillingly she stepped up to the wagon-bed, as the other women had to do, to get a foothold, and from there climbed on to the back of the horse behind Lockwood. She had on her gloves, which she wore all the time now, and from her wrist hung the little black silk bag. How could she touch even the coat of this man, gloves or not, with the repugnance she felt for him.

"I am doing it for Caspar," was all she could think of in order to nerve herself to the ordeal.

Just then there sounded a clatter of hoofs and there came Caspar urging his horse with all speed. He drew up suddenly at sight of her on behind Lockwood, but

perceived how gingerly she was holding on to the edge of the saddle with her finger-tips, and also the dolefulness upon her face.

"You promised to go with me," he almost shouted, "and I have come back for you; did you think I was not coming?" Everybody for a mile could have heard that clear clarion.

"She is going with me," said Lockwood, sullenly.

Diantha tried to think what was wise, but instinctively she found herself sliding down off the horse and running to Caspar's side. In a second he stooped, holding out his hand for a step for her, and she placed her foot on his broad palm just as she used to do at home when her brother Dan took her riding, and he threw her up on the horse's back, and at once was up in the saddle in front of her. Away they went, like young Lochinvar and his bride, Diantha thought to herself.

She actually put her arm about his waist to hold her on, for they went so fast she had to hang on somehow, and she was perfectly happy. She knew then that she had no talent for playing Cleopatra, not even to save Caspar could she do it. "Let them shoot and kill," she said to herself, "if needs be, that at least is respectable, while my sacrifice is a thing that borders on the indecent, and for the sake of — that little being which some day is to come into my arms — I must keep myself free from these dreadful things."

"Why didn't you wait?" asked Caspar. "I told you I would be only too happy."

"I didn't understand," she murmured.

"I have an apology to make," he went on, and she

listened attentively. "You see, I couldn't make you out, Quincy told me that he was sure you were being polite to Lockwood because you wanted to keep him from fighting with me."

"Isn't John the dearest fellow in the world?" she cried. "To think he could understand and what's more, make you understand?"

Caspar relapsed into silence.

"Don't you think it lovely that John Quincy should have had such faith in me that he should have been able to restore it in you?"

She had not quite forgiven him for not having believed in her. A spirit of mischief was born of the moment. "You weren't jealous?" she asked.

"No, I couldn't be jealous of a brute like that," he replied sternly, "it was only that I feared you belonged to his class after all."

"Well, I don't!" she said, half ready to cry with wounded pride, "I simply loathe the beast."

"I should not have dared to speak to you, only Quincy said he was sure —"

"Yes, of course! he believes in me, he has faith in me," she began, angered that Caspar should have failed to comprehend her until told by another.

"What are we having such a fuss about?" said Caspar, suddenly, looking over his shoulder at her, and his face was so close to hers that she forgot what she was talking about.

"I wish we could go like this forever," he said, looking straight into the clear windows of her soul.

"So do I," she murmured.

CHAPTER XVII

CAMPING IN THE GREENWOOD

THEY had arrived in the midst of the camp and Diantha slipped to earth once more. Already the women were setting the improvised tables and the men were pulling a seine through the river between the lakes and fetching up fish to be cooked for supper.

Watson seemed less shadowy while at work with the seines, Lockwood less prominent. Everybody seemed happy. When Everton and John appeared, carrying guns and the former holding forth a coyote-skin as proof of their prowess, Diantha was taken by surprise. There was a bout at boxing attempted by the men around the camp-fire for recreation, and amid exhibitions of skill it was Everton who came out champion of all those who knew anything about the manly art. They persisted in Caspar's trying on the gloves though he had never had them on before, and the men sat back to enjoy the sport.

"He can lift twelve hundred on the lifting machine," said John, "but I don't believe he can get anywhere near you, Mr. Everton."

While Caspar was laughing at the looks of his big wadded hands, Everton gave him a playful little tap on the nose. At that Caspar made a terrific rush forward, and hurled himself upon Everton, pounding his fists up and down, one after the other, like sledge-hammers,

raining the blows without cessation upon his face, without skill or finesse, but so powerfully that Everton had to back away from the onslaught, with Caspar following him up and never ceasing a moment till Everton called, "Enough."

Everybody was astonished, but they explained there was no art in that kind of "slugging," it was just brute-force. Everton laughed and said, "Nobody could have any art when it came to tackling the walking-beam of a steam engine." Then somebody discovered that Caspar had an enormous reach — that his arms were as long as John Quincy's, who was over six feet while Caspar was several inches less.

Diantha sat there with the women, like in the days of the Greenwood, watching all these strange proceedings. Vaguely she wondered if Caspar's arms were too long, and then she remembered how he had carried her over the river even as Diarmid had Grania, and of course he had to be strong to do that feat. The women and children were going to their tent. Diantha noticed that Lockwood had a pack of cards in his hand, and that he had persuaded John to join in a game with several others, to finish out the evening around the camp-fire.

Everton, however, was helping put up the camp tent for the men, and it seemed like a dream within a dream, to see him there in that place, working with his hands so usefully. She could not forbear saying something to express her surprise. He gave her an amused glance in return as he confessed that he had run away to sea when he was a boy and that he had all that sort of knowledge in reserve when he wanted it.

It seemed to her she had never known him at all.

She went to get a jug of water before going to the tent for the night, and met Caspar. He had his horse by the bridle going to tether him for the night.

The stars were brilliant above them in the rarefied air of the mountain but she thought his eyes were brighter than the stars. "I've been thinking it all over," he said rather huskily, as he always did in excitement, "and I think we shall have to be married, Diantha."

She simply looked at him in mute surprise. "But how," she gathered wit enough to say, "how can we, when there are so — so many obstacles?"

"Never mind, there is always a way," he said, "and when two people love each other the way we do, it simply has to be."

He did not know whether she loved him or not, Diantha reflected. He was the kind of man who could not imagine love without marriage any more than he could marriage without love.

"How do you know I love you?" she managed to say.

"You can't help it, because I love you so much." He slipped the bridle around his arm, suddenly reached forward and the horse threw his head up startled above them both, as Caspar kissed Diantha on the nose, just as awkwardly and as absurdly as if he were an osprey swooping for a fish. So Diantha thought, and on the instant the poor horse reared again, for she had given Caspar a good sharp box on the ear.

She felt all her resentment aroused within her to think he should be so presuming. And then she remembered how near she had come to kissing him when crossing the

river, and she blushed with shame at herself. She did not feel so sure that Caspar was not just as dangerous as any other man, and that she had been deceiving herself all this time in thinking him easy to impose upon. She never felt so abashed and humbled in her life as at that moment. She was glad to hear her name called from the door of the tent and answered promptly, "Coming Ellen—"

As she stooped, to take her jug of water, he said, "Don't be angry, I thought—maybe you rather expected to—be—kissed."

Worse and more of it! She simply ran from him as fast as she could, and crept to her place in the tent in a state of abject humility.

Ellen asked her if that Lockwood was bothering her, and she replied, "No, I was speaking to Caspar, who was tethering his horse." And Ellen smiled and said with the utmost complacency, "Oh, Caspar?" as if he were the next thing to the arms of Providence for safety.

Caspar, indeed!

She decided that she had never met such a bold man in all her life.

CHAPTER XVIII

ON THE TOP OF THE WORLD

EARLY next morning, with a studied and over-zealous politeness, Lockwood was playing cavalier to the women, who were making a start for the climbing of old Mount Granite. In short skirts, leggins, jackets and tam o'shanter they made an interesting group, as each one strapped on her flask of water and grasped firmly her alpenstock.

As Diantha reached out her arm to receive her flask, the little black bag hanging from her wrist caught in the strap and caused her to delay in placing it. "Oh, put your handkerchief in your sleeve," suggested Miss Read, the school-teacher, "and don't be bothered with any bags on a trip like this, every extra pound weighs five before you get to the top."

Thus persuaded, Diantha glanced around. Lockwood was stooping down to pick up a fallen flask, no one was paying any attention. She drew off from her wrist, the tanglesome thing, and flying back to the tent, placed it inside her nightgown bag, under her pillow.

When she returned, the party was rallying Lockwood for backing out at the last moment from making the climb. If any doubt of the safety of her hand-bag touched her, she dismissed it as a morbid suspicion, and fell in behind Ellen on her upward way. As she looked

back, however, she noticed Tommy holding on to Lockwood's hand and wished she had the courage to tell Ellen how the child had been utilized in an attempt at bribery. But it was one of the things it was not wise to reveal and it was too unpleasant to dwell upon.

When they came to the bare heights above the timber-belt, some hours later, they had a momentary glimpse of the central lofty peak for which they were heading, and there on the top of it, was a flag fluttering in the breeze. A cry of surprise was raised at once and everyone hastened to see the sight.

Diantha thought Everton very insensible to the lovely vision and harbinger of welcome, so strangely flung out just as they appeared, from that grim old point of granite against the blue sky. She did not hesitate to find fault with him, and said most severely, "Were it my own banner I could hardly be more affected."

She perceived the exchange of glances between him and Ellen and then she understood it. It was Everton himself who had given them the delightful surprise. She was dumbfounded. She wondered to herself if a girl could possibly know what kind of a being a man was, even if she knew him a lifetime.

Little by little, after lunch, the members of the party fell back. The high altitude and cold breath from the snow-banks made the numbers decrease on that upward climb, until at last John went back with Ellen to the sheltered cove with the rest of the ones left behind, and there were Stanley Everton and Diantha in the lead, and Miss Read and Caspar following, the only ones who dared to try for the top.

Then Miss Read fell back with Stanley by her side and Caspar and Diantha took the lead.

At last they reached the tip top. It was a superb sight that stretched out in gigantic panorama before their eyes. Far below was a smiling green country with silver-ribbon streams running through, and then to the other side was a new world of unknown peaks, rock-ribbed and ancient, clothed in purple shadows all about its deep gorges, with here and there a relic of awful glacier days, where bare domes stood out as if sand-papered by the mighty forces of the centuries.

It was such a great space for the eye to dwell upon that it made Diantha's heart tremble to realize the vastness and splendor of it all. In spite of her claim that she had been reared near the edge of the glaciers, it was more a comparative term than a literal one, more symbolical than real, for never had she beheld anything to equal this magnificent scene.

Her pulses were beating so fast, that she had to pull her gloves off for relief. She felt herself overwhelmed as she thought how tiny were they in comparison, mere mites of people in a gigantic universe. She became dizzy, looking from such a height, and suddenly realized that Caspar's arm was around her steadying her.

She drew away, and he said, "Don't be angry, Diantha — haven't you forgiven me yet?"

"Why should I," she murmured.

"Well, I've always read in novels, that the man kissed the girl when they became engaged, and I supposed —"

"That I had read the same novels?" she continued.

"That — that was about it," he stammered. "I don't

know anything about girls at first hand, except my sister, and sisters don't count on a thing like that."

"Do you expect me to believe that?" she asked gently.

He laughed a funny sort of laugh, she thought. "You certainly can't think me much of an adept." And then she had to laugh herself, for the poor horse rearing above and that sudden osprey swoop and whack at her nose, was never told of any lover she had ever read of, as concomitants in the giving of a betrothal kiss.

She perceived that Everton and Miss Read were making no attempt to follow, and quickly she asked, "Honestly, Caspar, do you think that because a man asks a girl to marry him, that gives him a right to kiss her?"

"Maybe not, but until now, I had always supposed it was considered to be the proper thing."

"Do you suppose a girl wants to be kissed by every man who dares to propose to her?"

Caspar looked at Diantha intently. "Why, no — I never thought of that —"

"Well, how many proposals do you suppose I have had?" she continued, determined to make him see the point.

"I imagine a good many. Yes, of course, a fine, splendid girl like you, so clever and so beautiful and so good."

"Oh, never mind all that," she said confusedly. "But I am going to tell you the truth — there have been — twelve good men and true who have done me the honor to ask me to marry them, and not one of them has dared — to do — to think as you have."

He gazed at her fixedly. "I'm glad of that," he said, finally, "I shouldn't like to think my wife had been kissed by twelve men and that I was the thirteenth instead of being the first."

Diantha took a long breath at this piece of impudence.

"We are going to be married," said he smiling, in calm assurance, "nothing can prevent that!"

"It takes two to make a bargain," she said, looking off at the majestic panorama spread before them.

"Yes, but we love each other and we don't need any bargain," and he looked into her eyes with that beautiful irradiation in his smile that held her fast. She thought of the little song her friend Vivian used to sing to herself at the piano when she had thought herself heart-broken, before she met Howard.

"Love's slavery is sweet,—is sweet."

In that moment all her doubts faded away. They two, who had been waiting for each other, had met at last, as she had always dreamed they should, and here they two were standing at the top of the world, filled with great joy because they had found each other indeed. She felt the conviction that Caspar was her own true knight, tall and splendid, and that she was his appointed mate from the beginning of the world. And that God had sent him to her.

She could hear his heart beating in hard sledge-hammer beats, and his pulse set the currents of her own heart to a faster time. Under the influence of the wonderful moment she resolved to measure herself by a

greater and more splendid ideal — that she would not descend to her former petty estate — that she would be more generous, more kind, more pitiful, knowing that she had received the glory of a revelation which fell to few women of earth. Caspar was holding her hand, and then a voice called, “Halloo, isn’t it pretty cold up there?” Then she felt a strange sensation, an unaccustomed feeling to her finger, and when she looked she saw there was a golden circlet there, the plain gold ring from Caspar’s hand transferred to hers.

CHAPTER XIX

EVERTON IS SURPRISED AT HIMSELF

SHE came to the fact that there was a regular gale blowing, the flag above them flapping violently, and even her skirt was behaving like a banner. Caspar kissed her hand gently and then led the way down.

Behind a rock they found Miss Read and Everton sheltered from the wind. Diantha became aware that he was looking at her with a peculiar expression. Not wishing to be selfish in her happiness, she went along by his side while Caspar went ahead with Miss Read, who was anxious to get out of the wind.

All at once Diantha realized that Everton was being very serious. "I was never more surprised in my life," he was saying.

She echoed him in a faint tone. "Surprised?"

"At my generosity," he said meditatively, "I never would have believed it possible for any man to be generous enough to admit that his rival is the better man of the two."

Diantha was distressed, and entreated him not to use such a word as that, and assured him that there was no one who was half as good as he was. She observed a melancholy look in his eyes and it made her unhappy.

"I can see," he went on, "that you have found your — Caspar." And then in contrast to the quietness of his

words, he struck furiously at the rocks in his path and shattered his alpenstock.

"Were I—a Swede," and he took on a grim look that half frightened her, "doubtless at this moment I should be planning how to fling Caspar over the rocks to the gorge below, but being just a plain North American, I not only let him go on living, but I have to congratulate you on having found the man of your dreams."

"There is nobody half as kind and good as you are," she insisted, trying to change his mood. "Caspar is half a savage sometimes, and it is only because I am half a savage, too, that I can put up with him. O Mr. Everton," she burst out suddenly, "why don't you go back to New York and marry Colleen? She is very much better tempered than I am and a fine housekeeper, which I am not, and would make you very happy."

He did not laugh, he only said in a dry sort of way, "She is a dear, sweet girl and if I hadn't met you I should be charmed to ask her; but from all I can learn all you bachelor-girls have the same romantic notions and I shouldn't dare to put another one to the test."

She did not seem to understand.

"Romantic in one way and yet supersensible and calculating to the limit after all," he replied. "You girls, I have no doubt, have been looking into the future and considering all sorts of things; for instance, what you will name your children."

"Indeed, yes," she made prompt response, "the first son after our fathers—"

"It's unconventional and it's calculating, but it belongs

to our progressive age to arrange all these things beforehand, and doubtless," he went on in the same dry way, "you have all decided what sort of a man makes the best husband."

Diantha answered him without suspicion. "We do have peculiar ideas, I suppose," she said gently, "but there is something we think is far more important than that; it is not with us so much what kind of a husband a man makes, as it is what kind of a father he is going to be."

"That is rather important," he assented, still knocking things out of his way fiercely as he went.

"Important, I should say so," burst out Diantha, full of enthusiasm. "Why, what's the reason so many mothers are cursed with black sheep for sons? Simply because they married black sheep or the brothers of black sheep for husbands. We Pleiades girls would rather slave all our lives at business than undertake a job like that. We think of heredity and we think of the environment as affecting our future and we are going to choose what we will have. Why, there was somebody proposed to Colleen once and we asked her why it was she refused him. And she said she thought of her children, and how she would blush to lead such a specimen of manhood before them and say, 'Children, this is your father.' She said it was simply impossible."

"Rather a quaint idea," said Everton, musingly.

CHAPTER XX

EVERTON HURLS A ROCK

THEY had passed the snow-line and there was no one in sight. Diantha began to be greatly embarrassed at the turn of the conversation and angered at herself for her needless frankness. Also she was annoyed beyond measure to find herself lagging behind with Everton, and fearsome that she might find herself coming into camp long after everybody else, with more tongues wagging at her expense. Eagerly she wished herself down the trail with the others.

Acting on the impulse almost childishly, she began to run ahead recklessly, in the hope to catch up with Miss Read and not be left behind so stupidly. She saw a crooked pine below she thought she recognized as a landmark when coming up. Toward this tree she sped, making a short cut down the hillside with the expectation of reaching the trail that wound about below, as she imagined.

It was a foolhardy thing to do, to step away from the beaten route, as any mountain-climber might know, but she was in such a panic to avert any more cause for talk especially in having her name linked with Everton's, that she rushed into worse perils unaware of them. She hardly noticed that she was on a bank of gravel and

pebbles that oozed along in little trickles, here and there, behind her, nor did she know that just beyond her to one side was a great jumping-off place, where a landslide had gone down leaving an abrupt and fearful declivity.

Where the trail wound around in a serpentine from the path she had just left, were Caspar and Miss Read resting by a boulder and waiting for Everton and Diantha to join them. They heard the peculiar sound of the trickling pebbles and hastened to see what could be causing it, and there beheld Diantha making her way, almost as if for the edge of the precipice.

"Oh, she will be killed!" cried Miss Read, shrinking from the sight.

Caspar tried to call out to Everton, who was standing above, but he could only wave his arms to him to try to stop her. Already Everton had perceived her danger, but she ignored his call to come back, being determined to have her own way. The only thing that could be done to hinder her from going in the direction of the precipitous edge was by getting something there before her to show her the danger ahead. Then she would have to stop. He realized he might make a terrible mistake, but something had to be done instantly. Already he had a small boulder in his hand carefully poised to strike and to roll away from her. Then white as death, with a great heave he sent it bounding down the slope toward the jutting edge. It was a fearful hazard. The sound of its impact reached the girl below. She stopped and turned. Then she perceived the terrible thing rolling,

as it went, with its added momentum, and hastened out of its course even more, watching it till it struck a rock and bounded off into space.

She noticed then the little trickling pebbles of the bank she was on, and while she sought firmer ground, thought it was she who had dislodged the stone on her way down, and considered what a mercy it was that it had taken a course so far to the right of her. She saw Everton above her, standing there so strangely still, she was aware something terrible had happened; possibly someone in the camp below had been hurt.

As she came up the slope again, she was pale and breathless. "Oh," she exclaimed, "I hope no one was hurt, when that rock struck way down below. Do you think it went near them?"

Everton was looking at her wildly. "Thank God!" he said fervently, "don't ever do anything like that again."

"Why, what is the matter?" she asked.

"How like to the wild ass's colt thou art, O Ephraim!" he muttered.

"But what is there to be angry about?" she insisted.

"If you should ever have a son and that son should throw himself over a precipice," said he mockingly, "don't be surprised, the unfortunate son would not be to blame, it would be simply because his mother took the notion once upon a time that she was a Rocky Mountain sheep."

She tried to make out what it was he meant and decided that it was some sarcastic reference to the "black sheep," which she had referred to in their previous con-

versation. Then he went on, "If you were a child of mine I should shut you up on bread and water for a week. I never had such a fright in my life! Just look! Isn't my hair like the driven snow?"

He took off his hat as he spoke, half in jest and all in earnest. "She's all right," he cried to the two just beyond, and then she came up out of the hollow in the slope and saw Caspar and Miss Read. Miss Read was holding a handkerchief to her eyes and Caspar looked at her strangely.

"What is it?" Diantha cried, half terrified, "did any one get hurt by the rock down below?"

"I couldn't bear to look," said Miss Read, weakly, "I thought you were going over the cliff, before you could stop."

As she reached their point of espionage and beheld what they had seen, the hollowed-out slope below with its shifting soil of loosed pebbles, and beheld the sheer edge of the jutting cliff and the awful abyss below, she became so faint that she sat down with a weak feeling creeping over her. The trail serpented around by a very short curve and took its way to the other side of the little crooked pine she had taken for a guide.

She remembered then that sometimes in the city when she went into a large building and came out again that she got turned around like that, that the street seemed reversed for a moment, but she had never thought such a thing as this would happen to her in the country.

"But why did you do it?" at last asked Caspar huskily in his agitation.

"I was trying to catch up with you and Miss Read!"

she said meekly, "and I thought I was making a short cut for the trail."

Then she met Everton's reproachful glance and fell behind in the little procession going down the trail, as if to make amends for her unfortunate speech. Not until she heard the voices of those from below did she dare to break the silence, and then it was to hope that no one had been hurt by the falling boulder; for her punishment would be greater than she could bear for just a little mistake like that.

Everton assured her they would not be laughing like that unless all were well with them down there, and that she was not to worry, as the rock had been dislodged by himself, not her, and that she was in nowise to blame for it.

"And was that why you stood there like a man carved from stone?" she asked, bewilderment mingling with her gratitude to him for assuming part of the blame.

"I suppose so," he returned. "And now about that riddle of yours. If I had not solved it I could not have understood why you were trying to catch up with Miss Read so well." He looked into her eyes gravely.

"You can't blame me," she murmured, "if you knew all I have been through on account of this old mountain."

"I do know," he said briefly. And she wondered how much of the whole truth was his.

"It was only a word that flew like a bird,
From North to South in every one's mouth,"

he repeated. "That is the penalty you pay for living

in a small community where every one knows your affairs better than you do yourself."

"Yes," she assented, "one can be alone much better in the city."

He did not triumph over her in this concession of hers, he only went on to say that he was filled with admiration at the way she had met the difficult situation forced upon her, that her alliance with a woman like Mrs. Mackintosh had disarmed everyone, that the women all had learned to love her for her interest in them and their children, and the men all respected her, so that the evil words of Lockwood had only aroused the anger of them all.

"Just the same, he ought to be killed, the low hound," he added hoarsely.

"Oh," exclaimed Diantha, with her hand pressed to her heart, "I don't want anybody killed; it would follow me all the rest of my life."

"You are right," he said, "guess we'll have to go on being just plain North Americans boiling with red-hot rage, but keeping the laws just the same."

"Yes," said Diantha, faintly.

"But he'll get the law all right," said Everton, grimly, "there'll be some comfort in that. Why haven't you told what you know? I suppose it is all for Caspar's sake, lucky dog! I can see you are going to win that thousand, and maybe the five thousand."

"Hush," she exclaimed, "there is no bet between us; don't speak so loud. What if he should hear?"

Everton was taken completely by surprise at first. Then an understanding seemed to come to him. "Oh,

yes! of course, a simple fellow like Caspar wouldn't understand a thing like that, I can see."

Diantha's face was pale and her hazel-gray eyes full of suppressed feeling as she begged him not to mention that dreadful bet to her again and assured him she had never looked upon it as anything but the folly of the moment.

"But you would never have come to Boulder if it had not been for that folly," he insisted.

"Please," she entreated, "I have a reason."

As they came into the group waiting for them, she went ahead. But Everton remained looking out upon the great piled-up rocks and gorges, beginning to be clothed in the purple shades of distance. It was a majestic and splendid revelation of nature. He saw some one was by his side.

"Glorious country you have here, Caspar," said he, "but you've never been to New York. You can never really appreciate the West until you have lived in the city." And Caspar admitted that he hoped some day to be able to visit New York and see it for himself.

"Don't say anything about it, but maybe I could fix up a plan so you could go this fall," said Everton, his eyes ablaze with intensity.

Caspar laughed and said that was too good to be true. "Leave it to me," said Everton, and he began pulling at his moustache.

It would not be fair to him, he assured himself, for that bet of his to be decided until Caspar had gone to New York and Diantha had tested him there. As for the bet being off that was pure nonsense.

He drew a letter from his pocket. It was from his friend Howard, whom he had taken into his confidence. He read again a certain paragraph.

"This local Hercules may be all Diantha thinks he is, but I doubt it. He may appear to have sand, but I bet you five hundred dollars, I can make him 'squeal.' Just fetch him to New York and let me have a try at him."

Not yet had Everton come to the full poignancy of suffering in his love-affair with Diantha and in being thus rejected for another. That stage of feeling was yet to come. To him it was still the game, and his nature had not had time to change from its usual habit of viewing things cold-bloodedly. And yet, hardened as he still was, as he dwelt upon this proposition of his friend Howard's to help him out, he felt a strange compunction for the moment. If as a result of this bet, Diantha should be convinced that Caspar was not the fine fellow she thought him, she would then marry him. All was fair in love and war, he assured himself. It was the game that one should lose, why not Caspar instead of himself?

Yet in spite of the fact that he was his rival, he had learned to like Caspar, to admire him for his honesty and splendid qualities. He hated to think of being guilty of a meanness toward him.

Everton stood there trying to justify himself. He knew he had but to reveal to Caspar the bet he had made with Diantha to see him withdraw from the contest. But an act like that was beneath any man and positively contemptible. He would win her from him

if he could, but it should be done by the rules of the game, fair and square, in honorable battle. But he must have that final battle on his own ground, in the city. How then should he proceed so as to have the approval of his own conscience?

He looked off at the darkening horizon, and closely calculating, said with half-shut lids, "I'll bet my money on Caspar and against myself! That's fair enough for any man!"

CHAPTER XXI

FIVE MEN WHO ONCE WERE BABES

WHEN the party arrived in camp, it was Tommy who was the first one to rush to meet them. He came like a small cyclone and greeted them all, one after another, men and women alike, with violent hugs and kisses. As Diantha came in for the first share of his effusiveness, she also received the first installment of his gatherings for the day in the way of climate, soil and productions. And as she kissed him in return she wondered vaguely why it was that the small boy has such an affinity for Mother Earth and also sugar at the same time.

"Be careful!" she cried to Mrs. Mackintosh. "Tommy is awfully sticky!"

"Sticky," the fond mother repeated. "Why, Tommy, I hope you have not been eating candy, you know the doctor said it was not good for you."

"Nope," said the sugary cherub, climbing all over her.

Ellen, who was a fine woman, had but the one weakness of being Tommy's mother. To her, he was a treasure, a keepsake from God, just a little less than the angels, but not more than a barleycorn less. To Diantha, who knew him better, he was a four-year-old Bowery tough. She knew for all his stained-glass halo of childhood, that he could lie and steal and swear and

be sly as an imp. And when she realized the ignorance of the mother over her own child, she was moved to wonder if when she had the rearing of a small boy of her own if she would be as blind as Ellen was, and whether blindness was a necessary ingredient of motherhood that its trials and sorrows could be endured?

Around the camp-fire they sat that evening, and as someone played a plaintive air upon a willow-whistle he had made, and someone danced a rustic jig while they all "Patted Juba," Diantha kept looking at the picture Ellen made, sitting there in the fitful firelight holding Tommy, all clean and sweet now, in her fond arms. He was more like a cherub than ever, a picture of gold and pink and white innocence fast asleep and safely guarded by her maternal love.

She was thinking to herself that she did not wonder that in all ages they represented the woman in sackcloth and ashes, mourning over her son, as the most powerful phase of human suffering. "Every mother in any age or clime who has received a man-child from the Lord could gaze upon the semblance given of holy motherhood and comprehend in her own heart what it stands for so poignantly," she thought to herself as she looked at the living picture before her.

Then she called to mind a description Showery had given her of a grand painting she had seen in the Guild-hall when she was in London. It was among a collection of Murillo's. "Why," Showery had said, "it was perfectly beautiful and at the same time perfectly sensible. You would have thought it was anybody's mother; sitting in a chair with arms held out helplessly in despair

because her son was so wild and reckless, and she couldn't do anything, but just pray, and leave him to God, but on the catalogue they called it a 'Madonna.' "

Diantha thought Ellen would be that kind of a Madonna in years to come, if she did not wake up in time and provide a better environment for poor little Tommy.

She made up her mind resolutely that she would not indulge in blind worship of her boy if she should ever have one; but that she would like to be able to see his faults when he was small and teach him how to make a man of himself for the time when he was grown up, and then to have faith in him because she could "bank" on his character. She began to wonder how a woman could go to work to do that. Caspar's mother could bank on him all right, she must be a wonderful woman, she thought to herself.

She looked around at them all sitting about the fire, bearded men with seamed faces, mostly, and Lockwood so pasty white with a watchful gleam in his red-rimmed eyes; shadowy Watson, with a look of fear upon him; John Quincy smiling and whirling a burning stick from the camp-fire about his head like a grown-up child; Everton, who met her eye eagerly, a strong, resolute man; Caspar, who sat in the background, so modest and yet so bold; and all of these once had lain as helpless as did Tommy, in the arms of their mothers and doubtless were as sweet and fair to gaze upon.

A good man was the noblest work of God and the mother of a good man must be the happiest woman upon the earth, she thought. Had not these five men started even in the race? What had entered into their lives to

make them thus different? What sort of little fellows had they been?

Diantha had an ingenuous way of her own in obtaining answers to her questions, and presently she was gleaning a bit here and there of childish history that gave her material to think of for the years to come.

John Quincy had been left to the nurses for his early training, and used to "holler" till he got what he wanted, and he admitted he must have been an awful bore. Lockwood bragged that he was the best child of his family when he was little, that he never was whipped till he killed a cat one day and when his father had "tried it on" he had put his teeth into his father's leg, and nobody had ever wanted to tackle him again. Everton said he had not been much to brag of as a cub, that he ran away and went in swimming and stole watermelons, and was only surprised that he did not get more thrashings than he did. When it came to Caspar's confession, every one was surprised. "He had been as bad as they make them," he said, "at the tender age, and it had been a toss-up whether he would turn out a bank-wrecker or just a mere anarchist!"

Ellen woke up and declared he must be joking.

He insisted, however, that his school-teacher had announced in school once that a boy so destructive and so bad-tempered as he, would come to the gallows some day. He explained that he was always taking things to pieces to see how they were made, but that nobody could be expected to appreciate what he was after. He related an incident of how, when he was two years old, he had carried off a tumbler from the table and had taken it to the

front door where there was a great flagstone, and had dropped it there with a splendid crash that was like music to his ears; after which he had returned for another and another, until he had smashed five of them, when his father who had followed him to see what he was at, had taken him in hand. "It was so vividly imprinted on my mind," he added with a comical little smile, "that for years after I used to dread to take a piece of glassware in my hand."

"Surely you were not whipped, Caspar, when you were only two years old?" asked Ellen anxiously.

"Why not? All children are born anarchists," he said, "and they have got to learn obedience and submission to the laws of the community, somewhere along the line, and," he added in an amusing way of his own, "I should think a slap at two years old is more efficacious than a cowhiding at twelve."

Lockwood repudiated the idea, and insisted that it broke a man's spirit, and that beatings were only meant for horses, women and dogs.

At this brutal speech, a strange sort of silence fell upon them all. It was broken by Quincy standing up to his full height and demanding, "Shall I lick him, Mrs. Mackintosh?" in a half-funning way that covered the awkwardness of the moment.

With a common impulse the women and children withdrew from the camp-fire, much as they did from the hall when Tannhäuser indulged in his brutality, amid the men faithful to their gentler selves in the presence of their womenkind. So Diantha thought as she sought the tent. She had obtained some glimmerings of truth,

however, from the half-confessions of these men, and she decided that it was the undisciplined boy that made the black sheep in later years.

That there had to be some strength of character and some stubbornness to begin with in order to have the essential quality of manhood, she was convinced. But that this quality had to be brought under cultivation, like the tempering of the steel, by test and discipline and control, in order to evolve the man worth producing.

The heredity of the boy might play an important part, and so might the maternal prenatal influence, but she resolved that the environment of the child was the most essential of all to the making of a good man.

"How the men can sit back and let that Lockwood insult the women on top of all the other harm he has brought to Boulder," exclaimed Mrs. Watson, passionately, with a bit of red flaming in her thin cheek, "I can't understand. If I were a man —" and then she bit her lip to keep from saying more.

"You would do as they do," remonstrated Miss Read, gently. "They are angry enough to kill him, but they put up with it for our sakes, they bear it because —"

"Because they are just plain North Americans," suggested Diantha, quoting from Everton.

"Never fear," said Ellen as she lay Tommy down upon the pillow, "Barry's day of reckoning is coming, it is coming as certain as day follows night."

CHAPTER XXII

THE MISCHIEF OF SLEEPING TOMMY

IN the midst of the preparations for retiring, Ellen gave a glance at Diantha and remarked she supposed it was all settled, and when Diantha pretended ignorance of her meaning, Ellen told her it was enough for her to see Caspar's ring on her hand. "Are you not engaged to Caspar?" she asked.

Diantha looked doubtfully at the golden circlet. "I suppose so, but I don't know." And Ellen fell back on her old Scotch saying, "Of all the twa's —."

"I know it," admitted Diantha, "we are so queer we don't ever talk sense — we only have controversies all the time."

"Oh, I wouldn't begin that way," said Mrs. Mackintosh. "You must forgive him the small faults, because you know he has the rare virtues, the essential qualities, because he is a good man, and good men have their faults, too. Nobody is perfect, you know. If you want to be happy, take my advice, and give in on the little things, and save all these scrambles and fusses and unnecessary arguments, they don't pay."

Diantha knew she had her faults also. Nothing would have made her more light-hearted than to have flung away all the concealment and calculation that held her bound, in the compact with herself. It was an unaccustomed

sensation to feel that her heart was pulling against her head, that she desired most of all to push away the obstacles that stood between her and Caspar and to plunge into the future with him, recklessly without regard to sense or reason. That she might almost have done, had it not been for the deception that also stood between them and every day assumed larger proportions, till she was no longer free to choose. Some day she would have to reveal to him the fact that she was not the support of her family, and that she had more money than he had or could hope to have, for years.

She pushed the thought from her impatiently. She would explain it to him some day very soon, and it would be all right.

She opened her nightgown bag and drew out her little belongings. A feeling of recoil came over her, which she could not understand at first, till she discovered it came from a sticky sort of substance on her gown. Puzzled by this discovery she began to look for her little hand-bag, and found it also was peculiar to the touch. She investigated the little notebook within, and was angered to discover that its fair pages were not as clean as they should have been.

A touch of suspicion came upon her, and she glowered at Tommy, now lying in his little white gown on the pillow with his golden halo of hair about his pink and white face and his long lashes curling up from his closed lids, the picture of cherubic innocence. "All children are born anarchists," she thought to herself.

All at once she remembered her compact with herself, made, up on the top of the world, on the grand old jutting

peak that day, not to be so petty and small, that she would be more kind, more generous, more pitiful, as a result of the splendid revelation made to her that glorious day. She felt ashamed of herself and tried to overlook the thought of the child having meddled with her belongings, as a trivial thing, not worth noticing. Down deep in her sub-consciousness, however, she felt a strange prophetic sense of coming trouble oppressing her that she could not define. Toward morning she went to the door of the tent to get a drink from the jug of water there and was surprised to hear the softened sound of the tramp of a horse. She peeped out and saw it was Watson leading an animal to the corral and he seemed more shadowy than ever. When she wakened in the morning, she decided she must have dreamed it.

CHAPTER XXIII

THE GRAND CARAVAN

THAT Lockwood was in brutal high spirits that morning of the breaking of camp and making ready for the return to Boulder, he made every one feel. He succeeded in insulting nearly every one with his uncalled-for hilarity at their expense. John Quincy he addressed boldly as "Softy"; Caspar's helpfulness he announced in circus-style, as "the feats of the modern Atlas who thinks he is carrying the world on his back"; and Everton's efforts to "strike" tent, he heralded as "the act of the great Gyasticutis, the latest importation from New York City, in his magnificent feat of climbing a ridgepole when the pole is on the ground."

Mrs. Watson gazed into Diantha's eyes peculiarly and said faintly, "That man, he has been the ruin of my life," and then she went on to say in an ordinary way that she had really made some very nice tissue-roses from the fashion-magazine she had sent to her.

Early in the morning, John had asked Diantha to ride over on the trail with him to the wagons, and she had assented, if he would come and take her over the very first one of them all, in the hope of escaping any further attention from Lockwood. However, Lockwood strode up to her familiarly and holding his animal by the bridle said significantly, "Going with me?"

"I'm very sorry," she murmured — and then John came hastening to her rescue. She decided that not to save her own or anybody's life would she parley a moment more with the brute. It was not wise for a woman to deal with so dangerous a creature,— a being lost to the first principles of manhood. To escape from Lockwood was the only thought in her mind.

Gladly she accepted John's help to mount the horse, and gladly she found herself behind him and on the trail and on the way across the river.

John confided to her as they went, that he was quite sure that Lockwood's horse had been driven hard during the night, and he couldn't make it out; for Lockwood himself had slept in camp all night, for he saw him "lying between Caspar and Everton when he woke."

Diantha asked how any one could ride Lockwood's horse and he not know about it.

But John explained that Lockwood evidently did know all about it; for when he himself had told him about the mare being splashed and about the river-mud on her hoofs, he had cursed him and had told him to mind his own business, and had threatened him that he would get even.

"And that was why he was calling me, 'Softy,'" said poor John, still resentful over this insult.

Diantha tried to soothe his temper by assuring him that Lockwood served as an excellent example of the horrible kind of monster that any sensible young man would take warning by. John agreed that he ought not to have gambled with him when they were out camping that way, but that he had only lost twenty dollars to

him. And Diantha told him that some day his wife and children would be starving doubtless, while he was playing cards and drinking with some monster just to please him.

"I should think you would brace up and try to learn how to be disagreeable, for a change," she observed, dryly. Nobody could do anything with a fool! She was afraid poor John was already past praying for.

"I was afraid you wouldn't like it," he said simply.

And she felt sorry for him in spite of herself. "But what can any one expect of a boy brought up by paid nurses,—and in a city?" she thought to herself.

She stood waiting for the women and children to arrive, and was pleased to see Everton coming with two little ones and very much amused at the whole performance. She took them down and then he went back for others. When Caspar came he turned his face from her because she had not waited for him to fetch her over. At last all had arrived, and John was riding up and down in a boyish sort of way, with Lockwood looking on, when a strange thing happened, which no one could explain nor comprehend.

Hardly had the last woman been landed, when Lockwood made it appear that his horse had become fractious, and that he must conquer it, and so amid the plunging and curvetting of the frightened beast it ran against the horse that John was riding, reared up, and before any one knew what had happened, poor John Quincy was thrown off and lying silent in the middle of the road.

A great fright came over everyone. Lockwood threw

himself down off his horse in pretended solicitude and said he had thought that Quincy was such a cowboy he would stick to a horse better than that, that he was only in fun and thought it would amuse the women and children. Everton in an authoritative manner thrust Lockwood away and told him he deserved to be thrashed. Caspar helped him to lift John up from the dust, put some whiskey to his lips, and then lay him on some blankets by the roadside. Presently John opened his eyes and a great relief came to them all.

Ellen took Diantha's arm and led her off to walk up and down the road. She was very pale.

"There was murder in his face," said Ellen. "Surely you don't think he could have done that out of jealousy, do you?"

"Jealousy," Diantha echoed, vaguely.

"My dear girl, didn't you get off his horse and ride with Caspar, going over, and didn't you refuse him coming back and ride with poor John? Men don't forgive that kind of thing."

"But," said Diantha, angrily, "he is married and has a wife and children. I think it is just his general cursedness, if only some one would give him a good thrashing!"

And Ellen said, "Amen!"

The procession was ready to start, and they were recalled by the stentorian tones of "All aboard," uttered by Dow, the grizzled citizen.

When Diantha and Ellen hastened to their places they found that John had been persuaded to ride in the break with them. All the color had left his face and

he found he was badly jarred and his arm sprained. He was being congratulated by Everton for having escaped without broken bones.

"But, I can't see, even now, what he wanted to do it for," said John innocently. In answer to this, Everton gave a reproachful glance at Diantha, as if in mute disapproval. Caspar rode behind, and she began to realize that this was the accepted explanation of John's misfortune.

She herself knew better. Did it have something to do with the knowledge John possessed of the secret night-ride of Lockwood's mare, which she saw Watson leading to the corral in the early morning?

The major-domo cracked his whip and they were off, at the head of the procession with their out-riders adding to the gayety of the scene, as they passed by pine mountain and crystal stream through the pine-fragrant land. The children began to sing "My Country, 'tis of thee," in the midst of which, Diantha saw that Lockwood had dared to come and ride close to the wheel on her side. He seemed like a portentous darkness in her life.

"When are you thinking of leaving us, Miss March?" he said significantly, and loud enough for all to hear.

"A week from Saturday," she said faintly, "unless I change my mind."

"Are you going back to dear old New York?" began John, who was in a high fever by this time, "because if you are, I believe I will go, too."

Lockwood kept close to the wheel and began saying things in a low tone; that she needn't think she could

fool him about her not knowing Everton before she came to Boulder, that he knew Everton was in love with her, and that she could do anything with him she wanted. And that he believed she was a spy sent out from New York from the first.

This was beyond human endurance. Diantha looked back and saw Everton and Caspar riding, one each side of the spring-wagon where were Miss Read, Mrs. Watson and several of the little ones. Her brain worked quickly in answer to her heart's desire to be there instead of where she was.

"Oh, I must speak to Miss Read about the festival," she said, standing up, suddenly. "Let me go there and Mrs. Watson can take my place."

The cavalcade came to a stop and presently Diantha was clambering up in the seat of the wagon beside Miss Read. What a relief it was to find herself in such congenial company! Caspar, who was riding on her side, gave her one of those swift glances of his, and she felt that he was not altogether angry at her. While Everton was saying something about the scenery, Caspar rode close to the wheel.

"Can you ride on a man's saddle?" he asked.

"Of course I can," she replied, promptly.

At that, Caspar spoke up and said, "What's the matter with you letting Miss March have a try at your chestnut, Mr. Everton?" and Diantha was amazed at his boldness. "Then you can take her place beside Miss Read, while we take a little spin."

She saw a strange look come over Everton's face, but he assented in that courteous way of his, and pres-

ently, they two, Caspar and she, were galloping along together, ahead of the procession, as free as air.

"Isn't this grand?" said he, smiling, and his eyes fairly gleaming with mischievous delight.

"Oh, but you are brazen," she said.

"Well, I thought I had punished you sufficiently and that I would reward you for a change," said he gaily.

"Punish? reward?" she echoed, "what have I done?"

She decided that that was the fascinating thing about Caspar, he kept her in a continual state of surprise.

"You didn't meet me for a little talk last night although I waited, and you went over the river with Quincy instead of with your own liege lord that I am going to be one of these fine days."

"Well, of all things!" she gasped, "of all the overbearing—" but in her heart she decided it was the most fascinating kind of overbearingness she had ever come across. She admitted in anybody else it would probably sound like brutality, but that in Caspar it was authority and masterfulness.

"I want to see you and have a good long talk where there will be no one around," said he impatiently. "We have got to make plans for the future, you and I! I wish there was some way of getting rid of these miserable people." And he waved his hand in the direction of the procession behind them.

"Nice people," she corrected, thinking of Ellen and others, and the generous man who had loaned her the horse she was riding on.

"Nasty people," he insisted, "they stand in the way, keeping me from you worse than Gorgons. I could

chop off the head of Gorgons — but these humans are merely pestiferous.”

Diantha looked at him in amazement. “Why, I didn’t know you could be so savage.”

Then it was he drew his horse in close to hers and looked into her eyes with that illumination-smile of his that took away the need of any reply.

They slowed down and presently he was making some mad remarks about their getting married that week, so they could have a moment’s peace together.

She looked at him intently and reminded him that they had nothing to get married on. And then he laughed, and said there was a change coming in his fortunes, but he could not tell her about it just yet.

The rumbling of wheels in the distance told of the advancing caravan and by the alarm of her conscience Diantha became aware that she was indulging in a forbidden delight. They were galloping ahead again but she knew it must come to an end. She could almost feel everybody talking about her for this recklessness of hers in going off with Caspar and, in sight of them all, showing themselves off so absurdly.

“Caspar, I am going back,” she said regretfully. “But I am going to go over to the office for a half hour, to-night, to post the books from Mr. Harris’ accounts, so I shall start all right to-morrow. Mrs. Mackintosh will come for me at half past nine. You can come fifteen minutes before she does, if you want to.” He announced he wanted an hour, but she only laughed and said they had years before them, and for him to save some of his talk for afterwards.

She wheeled her horse and went galloping back to the caravan, and there was nothing left for him to do but to follow.

But when Diantha returned to her seat by Miss Read she discovered that Lockwood had changed his place and had become outrider in the position vacated by Caspar. As it would only make a scene to try to oust him, Caspar accepted the situation as well as he could, but it was not without a dark frown that he fell in behind, moodily, by himself.

For Diantha's sake he had borne much, but there was a limit to a man's endurance and he felt that that limit was being reached rapidly.

"Whom the gods would destroy they first make conceited," was Diantha's thought as she found herself again listening to the mocking words of Lockwood determined to make her pay dearly for the pretended peace between them. "What makes you think you can pull the wool over my eyes?" he began familiarly. "Just admit that you came back here to get off with Caspar — that was all a blind of yours about wanting to talk with Miss Read — she's not heard a word about any old festival!"

Driven almost to desperation by the insolence of Lockwood, yet Diantha kept up a bravery she did not feel. She must not let him beat her like this she decided, and turned at once to her friend, the school-teacher.

"Why, Miss Read," she exclaimed, "haven't we been talking about getting up an operetta by the children for weeks and weeks?"

Miss Read assented readily. "And hasn't Mrs. Wat-

son been making tissue-roses for the decorations for a week past?" She nodded gravely.

"Well," said Diantha, her eyes gleaming with resentment and determination to show this creature she was not to be humiliated by him easily. "If our entertainment is not going to be a festival, I should like to know what you would call it. Shall we put you down for five dollars, Mr. Lockwood?"

He laughed in an insulting way and said something about her being so smart she'd beat the devil himself. Then it was that she looked imploringly into Everton's eyes, who at that moment had caught a syllable or two and was gazing at her puzzled. At that look of hers for protection he broke out into an assertion of authority, that made the lightnings flash from his eyes.

"For God's sake, Barry," he called out, fiercely, "if you don't go away and let Miss March alone, I'll thrash you within an inch of your life!"

Lockwood was defiant, and declared it would take two to settle who would do the thrashing.

Everybody was frightened. A scene and fight seemed imminent. What a shocking end to the delights of the camping trip!

"Wait till we get to Boulder," cried Diantha, promptly, "don't frighten the poor little children so, let us get them home first!"

All the outriders came galloping to the scene at the sound of the voices of the children crying in fright as Lockwood continued his threats. The old men surrounded him and begged him not to make a fool of him-

self, scaring the little ones that way. In response to their entreaties he agreed to go ahead and ride on to Boulder with one of their number.

Everyone breathed with relief to see the pair of horsemen galloping off and fading into the distance before them.

The rest of the horsemen by common consent fell behind the train and together with Caspar and Everton agreed that something would have to be done and at once, to put Lockwood under bonds to keep the peace or else he would have to leave town. "And I," said grizzled old Dow, "propose we send that Watson with him, fur it was them two as made us make sech fools of ourselves when they told us a new bookkeeper was coming to take the bread out of our mouths. And I tell you what it is. That Miss March not only forgive us fur mobbin' her when she fust come, but she has brought the bread of life to the women and children of our God-forsaken little town of Boulder. We owe her a mighty big debt and we ought to pay it!"

"That's what," went up unanimously.

It was agreed to have the Justice of the Peace come up from the Junction that evening and that they would all meet in the office of the Lumber Company and settle the matter for once and all. "This sort of thing can't be let go," said the grizzled citizen, grimly, "fur if we don't see to havin' law and order respected, we'll be havin' a man fur breakfast in Boulder and then Judge Lynch 'll be takin' a hand.

"That's what!" said the chorus of men, with fixed jaws and sinister flashes of fire from their eyes.

CHAPTER XXIV

THE INSINUATIONS OF LOCKWOOD

BY the time the caravan reached Boulder, Lockwood had changed his temper with his clothes, and came forth to welcome everyone with an over-done politeness that was almost more annoying than his brutality.

After dinner, Diantha went over to the office with Harris, who had laid aside his last crutch now, and was beaming happy. "I have you to thank," he said to Diantha, "I said you were a godsend, a good woman is always that, you know."

She was touched deeply by his words, but her thoughts were troubled by strange prophetic forebodings. She wondered why she was thinking of the chicken-yard at home, and how she remembered the fowls all running at the sudden sight of a dark shadow falling upon the ground? Oh, it was the fear of a hawk that was filling them with fear, and that was why they fled, of course! But what did that have to do with her? Was there an adumbration of a hawk-like woe falling upon her pathway?

She felt weary and sleepy and that her brain was indulging in unconscious cerebration. She resolved to add the two days' account that Harris had kept for her, give him the needful amount back for what he had himself spent, and call her duty ended.

And yet under all her strange foreboding, she was troubled with another matter; and it was not Caspar's but Everton's eyes that seemed looking into her very soul. Could it be possible that she was doing him an injustice? Was he better than she thought? Did he really mean what he said? It almost made her wretched, but she drove the disturbing thought from her in a kind of terror, as one would a bat that threatened to become entangled in one's hair. She had heard him, himself, admit his own unworthiness. If she had not done so, she would never have come West, she thought, never have seen Caspar!

"We may as well set this straight, Mr. Harris," she said sleepily, "I'll give you, the firm owes you, three hundred and fifty dollars, will you please open the safe?"

Harris smiled. "You forget, you're the only one who can do that."

She laughed, got down from her stool, went to the safe and began to work out the combination. "Of course," she said, "I am so tired I did forget!"

"Never have seen Caspar," her mind resumed, in a by-play of her sub-consciousness, "Caspar the sweetest, cleanest man — free from all those usual concomitants of a man — no tobacco — what was making her think of stale tobacco-smoke, she wondered dimly.

She knew she would see the trays inside, the rolls of gold twenties by themselves, and the tens and the fives, and the rolls of silver, just where she had placed them. She heard some one coming in, turned and was surprised to see that it was Everton and he seemed to have some-

thing confidential to say to Harris. Well, in a moment more she would be free from business and ready to go home with Ellen.

The door yielded and threw open to her touch, and again she thought of tobacco, and wondered why she could not see into the safe more clearly.

Then her heart stood still with a shock of feeling that something was the matter, followed by a harder pumping than ever.

“Bring a light, quick!” she said.

Harris picked up the lamp and held it so the rays of light could penetrate into the darkest corners. She was not mistaken, her eyes had not perceived what she expected to find there for the very good reason that what ought to have been there, was absent. “The gold has been taken,” she said, wide-awake now, and every pulse in her body beating madly.

“By the lord Harry!” ejaculated Harris gazing where she pointed, to the empty trays.

“What is it?” asked Everton lightly. “Not a mouse?”

They neither of them could make any reply, dumb in the presence of the awful calamity which might involve them both. At last Harris managed to whisper, “Gone — gold — all — gone!”

“What, a robbery?” exclaimed Everton in that high-pitched accent of incredulity of his. “Impossible!”

“You may well say, ‘impossible,’” spoke Diantha, white as a statue, “for here am I, the only one who has known the combination for a whole month.”

“Yet the gold is gone — nevertheless,” repeated

Harris, like a chorus, still peering into the depths of the safe.

It was a relief to the tension of the moment, when Caspar entered and at once Diantha told him the dreadful news. "I guess it is the same old work that was going on — before you came." He was interrupted by Everton who bade him to consider himself a witness to tell all he knew. And then he stopped, for standing in the open door was Lockwood with his most scornful smile and smoking lazily, letting the wreaths of smoke puff from his lips in an almost studied effort as if to show that there was nothing on his mind.

"Hello," he said familiarly, "what's up? I saw the light going and thought I'd join the conclave."

Then it was that Diantha remembered the faint smell of stale tobacco, when she opened the safe. It was not in itself very important, but added to the muddle of books, the shadowy Watson discharged from his place, the attempted bribery by means of the diamond ring and the roll of bills, it left no doubt in her mind as to who it was that had so cleverly made off with the missing gold. That he had ability, and that he had covered his tracks successfully she was well aware. She saw that she had "gambled" on her wits to fetch her out unscathed in vain, so far as her business reputation was concerned. He had beaten her.

"Let nobody talk to me about a devil with horns and tail," she thought to herself. "Those essentials belong to a poor innocent bovine, but picture him with upturned corners to his mouth, which is curved into a mocking smile, indent creases down his cheeks, and put red rims

around his eyes if you want to see a real creature of black malevolence."

According to the understanding, Mrs. Mackintosh came in saying it was high time Miss March was at home, but the words died away as she saw the tense white faces of the little group and only Lockwood smiling as if in great spirits. Diantha turned to her for sympathy in her wrought-up state of mind and exclaimed, "What do you think, Mrs. Mackintosh, some one has robbed the safe!"

"Robbed the safe," repeated Lockwood in over-acted theatrical tones. "My God! when was it done? Who saw the cash there last? Something ought to be done at once! Shall I telegraph for a detective?"

He threw away his cigarette and became most alert, peering into the safe as if he could discover what the others could not.

Not till then did the absolute deviltry of the plot dawn on Diantha in all its cleverness and malignity.

Everton held his hand to stay the over-enthusiastic self-appointed investigator of the crime. "Not until we have looked into the matter a little ourselves," he said, authoritatively.

But Lockwood began to bluster and to say that he was there to represent his uncle, Horace J. Lockwood, senior member of the firm, and he went on with protestations, as if he were the aggrieved one to be conciliated in the matter. "Well," he demanded, "what are you going to do about it? There's no time to waste, a detective ought to be telegraphed for,—he would be here by morning!"

Under the coating of sunburn upon his cheeks, Everton showed a strange paleness, from the suppressed rage that was consuming him.

"When was it done? That's what I want to know," repeated Lockwood excitedly, "was the lock tampered with?" He examined it and announced, "I see it is all right — in good order." Then he turned to Harris and demanded, "was everything all right when you left it Friday?"

"Of course it was, man!" said Harris testily, outraged at such a question. "You might as well ask me point blank, did I rob the safe?"

"Not at all, Harris," said he blandly. "I am only acting in the interest of my uncle, Horace J. Lockwood. Who opened the safe just now? I am asking merely to get some light on the subject?"

"You know as well as I do," he returned sternly, "that Miss March has kept charge of the safe for a month past."

"Why, of course he knows it," protested Diantha, impatiently, "but he wants to make the point that I, and I, alone, opened and closed the safe. That is the point, I admit, and according to present appearances it must have been I who took the gold. There is no other inference." And she gazed at him calmly.

"Oh, no, not at all," he replied, somewhat taken by surprise, "I was merely inquiring in the interest of —"

"Shut up," demanded Harris, who was ashen-white with suppressed rage — "another word out of your head, and I'll denounce you — as you deserve — even if you have the power to send me to jail."

"Don't be silly, Harris," said Lockwood, nonchalantly, "I may have had my faults like any man, sowing my wild oats, and who has not? And I may have borrowed small sums occasionally to help me out, as I had a right to do, in the position I hold, but that does not make me 'shut up' when someone has got away with a big haul like that!"

"How much is missing?" asked Everton. And Harris told that the men were to have been paid off on the following day, so that there was something over five thousand in the safe.

"A big haul," repeated Lockwood.

Everton looked him steadily in the eyes and said, authoritatively, "How did you know it was a big haul? I insist upon an answer."

"Why if the gold was missing, as I heard Miss March say, I inferred it must be a big haul."

Diantha remembered she had used these words to Harris alone, so that he must have been listening long before they knew it. But Lockwood returned the look that Everton was giving him so steadily that in a tale he would have proved himself guiltless, and therefore free from suspicion from that moment on the strength of that supposed-to-be test of innocence.

"Well, there is no use in our staying here," said Mrs. Mackintosh. "We can't fetch back the gold by standing here and talking. Come, Miss March, let us be going."

Diantha stepped to the safe to close it as usual, her brain feeling that hawks and bats of woe had indeed descended upon her, and found herself blocked by Lockwood, who had adroitly placed himself between. And

though he was smiling in her face, he said, "I think someone else had better take charge of the safe — or the silver may be missing, too."

Hardly were the words out of his mouth, when something that was launched through the air like a catapult struck him and bore him down, at Diantha's feet, and a heap of mingled arms and legs met her affrighted gaze.

In a few seconds there emerged one man holding the other by the back of the neck as one would grip a puppy and hold it forth.

"Apologize!" came the hoarse voice of Caspar, as he shook the form of the other to give emphasis to the word. Lockwood demanded, "Let go! you fool!"

"Not till you have apologized to Miss March," spoke Caspar, this time loud enough to shake the windows. And he gave him another prance up and down as if the creature were a jumping-jack in his grasp, in spite of his bulk.

Like a flash-light picture taken in a second, in the midst of that terrible scene, Diantha beheld a grim delight expressed on the features of Harris, and satisfaction beaming on the face of Everton.

All at once the lump of clothes assumed the shape of a man again, and Lockwood turned and said in the most peculiarly insinuating tone, "I'm sorry for you, Caspar, but if you knew what I do, you would not insist on this apology." As he was speaking, he drew something metallic from his pocket and slipped it around his hand. "You are such an innocent, backwoods fellow, that you don't understand things as they are," said he

persuasively. "Come outside, I don't want to say it in the presence of ladies."

"Whatever you have to say, say it here," exclaimed Caspar, hoarsely.

"No, I insist," he said, taking advantage of the moment to spring from the gripping arms that had given him a taste of muscular power and escaping to the doorway. He was still shaking from his punishment, yet from unsatisfied revenge, dared to stand there and say his say, the most terrible indictment that can be issued against a woman.

At the mocking words, that Miss March was the "light o' love" of Everton back East, there were two men who were launched into the air after him as he attempted to escape, and disappeared from sight but not from hearing.

Diantha clung to Mrs. Mackintosh as she heard the sounds of a body being banged around, and awful noises of hoarse voices like wild beasts growling over their prey, and at last three apparently frightful beings entered the room, dragging themselves in a kind of tangle to their very feet.

Ellen and Diantha were speechless with horror. But Harris stood there with that grim smile of satisfaction still on his face.

"Apologize!" came the command from two hoarse throats, only it sounded like a wolf's snarl rather than human speech.

The women drew away and hid their eyes to shut out the sight and Diantha cried, "Oh, let him go! I don't want his apology."

But the two still banged the third man around to break his will and make him yield. There came a moment when he made a pretense of giving in, and they let him sit up on the floor. "Now," they said grimly, "apologize!"

He gave a terrible laugh. "You poor fool," he said, looking into Everton's face, "why, she was out all night with Caspar." And he struck out at Everton with the hand that had what seemed to be a big ring upon it.

"Oh, oh," cried the two women, "he doesn't know what he is talking about."

"Well, he just does," hoarsely roared Caspar, "he has been taunting me with that for weeks." The two men held on to Lockwood so tightly that he was like a maniac in a straight-jacket, and while their breaths came prodigiously as they sought a breathing-spell thus bunched together, they perceived it was brass-knuckles that were gleaming so strangely upon his hand.

So closely had Lockwood been grappled with and pinned down in the effort to wrest the apology from him that he could make no use of this deadly weapon in his possession.

In this breathing-spell, Mrs. Mackintosh gave voice to her scorn, "Caspar indeed! and what of it? Isn't Caspar the most innocent of men, and didn't I send him myself, and didn't they come back engaged to be married in deference to the gossips of the town, and they hardly knowing each other? I'm ashamed of you taking any notice of the likes of him, he's crazy, he is out of his mind."

Then it was that Caspar had pounced down upon

Lockwood's right hand and had torn off the brass gleaming there and had flung it away.

Lockwood made a pretense of submission, and under all the grime and amid all the dishevelment tried to smile in his old mocking way.

Diantha resolved to do all in her power to stop the terrible conflict. She went over to where the three men were bunched up together, and stooped down and said with all the entreaty there was in her, "Mr. Lockwood, I gave you a promise that I would speak a good word for you to Mr. Everton. Shall I do it now and stop this frightful affair? I know that you never were punished when you were small and that you do not know how to take it as others do. Do you want to have me excuse you from making the apology? Just nod your head and I will do it!"

Had Lockwood been possessed of any sense, he could have ended it then and there. But instead, not having been seriously hurt, only having been pulled around and been made grimy, not having been made to feel in his carcass some poignancy of regret for his brutishness, he suddenly struck at the girl with all his force, giving her a blow that threw her backwards. And at the same second he took advantage of the distraction caused by this unexpected assault, by drawing a knife from his pocket and making a slash at the face of Caspar, but quick as lightning Caspar had dodged sideways so suddenly that he had lost his balance and fell on the floor, but was up and an arm's length away in another second.

The whole thing was like the turning of a kaleidoscope, for everything changed on the instant.

Lockwood now stood alone, a picture of murderous hate, flashing the piece of steel, and the two men and Harris bending over Diantha, with Mrs. Mackintosh giving her a drink of water and fanning her. While they placed her in safety, Lockwood stood ready for murder.

The other two men exchanged glances with a perfect understanding, he must be disarmed. Caspar ran to the front, Stanley behind, with feints to distract his attention. Then Lockwood's arm made a savage slash backward to reach Everton, and at the gleam of the blade, Everton stooped and ran under his arm and caught him about the waist with a fierce grip, while with his foot he tried to trip him. As the hand of Lockwood came to the front to carve at the arm of Everton bound about him, Caspar, as quick as a flash, gave it a sledgehammer blow — with his own hand underneath to break it against, paralyzing the arm, and they all came down together with the knife twisting out of Lockwood's grasp in a paracentric sort of direction hurtling to the feet of the two women.

Mrs. Mackintosh stooped to the ugly thing and took it up gingerly to get it out of the way, and drawing off her cape, wrapped it in its folds as if hating to touch the murderous thing with her hands.

Up to this moment it had been only a terrific wrestling match to compel a man to apologize for an insult to a woman. With all the drag and tear there had been no injury to bones nor vitals. But to disarm the murderous man and save Everton from being slashed, Caspar had given a mighty blow. Lockwood had succumbed to the

might of this force and lay upon the floor without any more fight in him.

Outside, flattened against the panes were men's faces gazing in at this bunch of men upon the floor, one stunned, one exhausted and breathing hard, and the third rising to his feet. Presently they swarmed in at the door and filled the room in an orderly way that was almost sinister under the circumstances.

"It's 'bout time Boulder was doing somethin' to show it has men in it!" grimly spoke old Dow.

John Quincy looked at the ugly brute who had been allowed his own way too long, as they put him in a chair and had the doctor test his wrist to see if it were broken, the men meanwhile expressing their admiration of Caspar's peculiar blow, as men do. At last John said in a simple sort of manner, "Well, Barry, I guess we are quits now for your knocking me off my horse to-day."

And Lockwood scowled at him.

CHAPTER XXV

DIANTHA DEMANDS IMMEDIATE JUSTICE

DIANTHA was standing like one in a trance. What was Lockwood's broken wrist to her? Or the fight or the throng of men gathered there so mysteriously? What was the seriousness of any or all of it compared with the imputation on her character as a woman or as a bookkeeper?

She realized that when a woman went out into the world to do a man's work, that she had two kinds of honor to maintain, that which is required of her sex, and also that kind of honor which is required of a man, that of honesty in his business relations with men. She had to be both honest and virtuous. And there she stood assailed on both those counts.

Being accused of robbing the safe was the same as taking away her bread and butter, and therefore the more serious in the eyes of the law. Strange as it may appear she comprehended that this count was the first that required to be settled.

Could it be possible that her life was already ruined? Had all her prudence, all her self-denials been in vain? Might she just as well have been a dancing midge in the sunshine, instead of trying to be a mother over herself in all her actions and manners? Besides there were those two men, Caspar and Everton. They had been her

champions, true enough, who had fought her defamer with their fists as men of the elemental order should do in defense of their women, but she was determined that from their minds should be removed the last scintilla of a doubt on that second count, which to her was the more terrible of the two.

How should all this be done? It was not enough that she should make known her suspicions of Lockwood, she must prove them to be well founded. She must prove him to be guilty of robbing the safe, to escape that imputation herself! But how, was the question.

Poignantly it came over her how her honest brother Dan had returned to the farm in disgust at his experiences in a lawyer's office. At first he was in love with his study in the law-books on equity, and had grand ideas on the dignity of his calling till he found that the chief thing to learn in order to make a success of that profession was how to defeat justice. She remembered his telling how innocent witnesses were asked if they had ever been in state's prison, in order to throw discredit on their testimony and enable the guilty ones to escape.

If she permitted this case to come to the courts, she would be badgered in the witness-stand by Lockwood's lawyer, discredited in every way, and her reputation doubtless be questioned, so that in the end she would be imprisoned and Lockwood would go free. And if even she escaped the tribunal her character would be smirched forever.

A mighty rage possessed her. What should she do? She wanted a public trial now at once. She desired

the truth to be known immediately, to have no rumors, no innuendoes, no suspicions to be started as gossip to be discussed on the morrow, but the facts in the case to be told freely instead. She gathered herself together, to try to be calm and wise. The men were acting in a strange kind of way, she noticed, as if by common impulse. Why could not a simple court of equity be set up here like in the olden days, without any lawyers to muddle the truth and defeat justice, something like the Arabs with the Cadi, who so cleverly settled matters?

When she had said that to herself she seemed to know how to proceed, and ignoring the pull at her gown by Mrs. Mackintosh, who wanted her to leave it to the men to settle, she resolutely went forward to the group of men and said she would like to speak to them a moment.

To her surprise, the group came to immediate attention as if they had been expecting to be called to order.

"Gentlemen," she said as bravely as a woman could, "do not forget that the safe has been robbed. The imputation is that I have taken the money from the safe. My reputation as a bookkeeper is at stake. I do not propose to sleep, nor to eat, until justice has been done."

She tried to imagine that she herself was her brother Dan, and to speak as she thought he might do, but it was as a woman she expressed herself after all.

"That's just what we're after," said Dow sternly, "and we've got the jestic of the peace from the Junction—and he's goin' to settle this yere case right off, before mornin'. So we'll call the meetin' to order with the jestic in the chair. And you can tell us all about it, Miss March, and we'll be glad to listen."

"You can call on me as a witness," said Harris quietly, "I think we can get at the root of the matter at once."

"That's right," said Lockwood sullenly, "take advantage of a man's being done-up to jump on him all together, without a chance to produce witnesses or anything." Here he winced from the moving of his arm. "I'm in no condition to stand any more to-night, I tell you, and I am going to my room."

"We can try it just as well without you," said Harris, "what have you to do with it any way?" That was the peculiar attitude that puzzled more than one, that Lockwood should assume he was to be called in question, though there was no suspicion of him as yet expressed.

There was a quiet conference as if it were already arranged and the justice, a thin man with a great shock of gray hair and a moustache like a Frenchman, only that he was from Kentucky, soon was at the improvised table and someone was acting as a notary. Lockwood became strangely alert in his suspicions.

"What the devil is all this performance about?" he questioned, angrily.

Presently there were chairs being brought in from the outside for all to be seated in, and Ellen decided to remain.

Diantha began to be troubled. She looked at Mrs. Mackintosh and her heart failed her. How could she tell before them all, of the part Tommy had played in Lockwood's scheme against her? Ellen, who had been so good to her, who had believed in her from the first, how

could she bring this pang to her heart? Yet it might be a kindness, albeit a cruel one, to waken her to the dangers besetting her child of which she was so ignorant. Because of Ellen's idolatry of her boy, should she be sacrificed? These were her thoughts when Miss Read entered leading Tommy by the hand.

"He was crying for you," said Miss Read to the mother who received him with hearty welcome, "and I heard there was something going on—" but it was lost as she took a chair next to Diantha.

Harris was the first witness called and he told about the locking up of the safe at noon on Friday by Miss March, when everything was in good order, and about the loss which had been discovered but a few hours before. He testified that he had been troubled the night before by noticing a horse tied in the brush, near the mill, from his office-window, but by the time he had put on his clothes and had gone out to investigate, he heard someone riding away furiously. Suspecting something wrong he had gone into the office and had examined the safe only to have his fears set at rest, for there was no sign of any one being there, save for one small thing.

"And what was that?" asked the justice.

"Just a cigarette half-burned. But when I picked it up off the floor I am quite sure it was still warm." Diantha glanced at Lockwood. There was a steely glitter in his small black eyes.

Mr. Everton's testimony was to the effect that this was not the first time that a sum of money was missing from the safe, that the books had been falsified and the

bookkeeper dismissed on several of these occasions, but that the robbing had gone on nevertheless. Diantha was surprised to see Watson in the crowd and he seemed to be nodding to her in encouragement, and she thought it splendid of him that he should be thinking of her instead of himself, who was really in danger.

Everton went on to tell of the need for a new bookkeeper, and how Miss March, hearing of the vacancy in New York City, had applied for the position as she wanted a change of climate for a time, and he added, with due respect for the title, that she was a Chartered Public Accountant. From the day of Miss March's arrival the books were kept as straight as a string and as plain as day.

He stopped there and maintained a most effective silence for what seemed to Diantha a long moment. She began to take fresh courage and to say to herself that with a record like that it was not likely that the fair fabric of her life could be destroyed by a man like Lockwood.

Everton then suggested that Miss March be called on to tell about the safe being left to her care, and she was ready to stand forth in defense of her character as a bookkeeper, but it was the second count that was absorbing all her energies and power of thought, while she was meeting the first. Her effort was to concentrate on showing how some one else than herself had gained access to that missing gold.

As simply as she could, she told how three hundred dollars had disappeared mysteriously, some four weeks before, and that it had so worried her in trying to balance

her books that Mr. Harris, himself, had suggested that she keep the combination of the safe. Everything had gone well from that time on, until some one in the office had declared it to be a very unsafe proceeding for it to be left to her, as in case of the death of the book-keeper in an instance which was given, the safe would have to be blown open before any business could be transacted. This had set her to thinking, she said, and she had jotted down the number of the combination she had selected in the back of a little notebook which she always carried with her in a little hand-bag. Then she told how it happened the day before that she had been persuaded to leave this little receptacle behind her, and how she had placed it under her pillow in the tent.

She remarked that there was some one in the party who very strangely had decided to remain behind in camp and not go along as at first intended. When she returned and was about retiring, she had made the discovery that this little book and hand-bag had been tampered with.

"The fact is," she said as deliberately as she could with her heart beating hard and fast, "that the some one who remained behind in camp as soon as I had put my little hand-bag into the tent, was also the person who had resented my having the safe left to my charge, the one who had said that it would be a risky thing for the firm in case I should die suddenly. So that it was not at all strange that I should be suspicious that he had been investigating my little notebook in search of possible numbers I might have jotted down there, if indeed he had not already made sure of my having done so

without my knowledge. And yet it did seem impossible, and I tried to banish the suspicion from my mind as a very wild sort of a guess."

Lockwood was watching her intently, but she went on trying to keep to the main point she was endeavoring to make, yet oppressed by the fact that to save herself she would have to sacrifice that friendship she held so dear. Could Ellen endure it? Was there a mother great enough to put aside her pride in her child when more than a girl's life was hanging in the balance? Were she a mother could she endure it? She resolved that she would try to be just, that she would try to put justice first and her pride second.

"However," she was saying to the assembled citizens of Boulder in the spontaneously organized little court of equity, "when I opened the safe this evening and the fumes of stale tobacco came stealing out into my face before I even knew that the safe had been robbed, the conviction had crept over me that some one had opened the safe in my absence."

Little Tommy, having slept almost all the way home from Twin Lakes, had had his nap out and was as bright as a new gold dollar. He had been slyly sliding around the room from one citizen to another, getting up to the desk and upsetting the pens and ink, and then wearying of this pastime, he had dropped down under the chairs and had crawled along to where Lockwood was.

Diantha noticed how the child came out in front of him with evident triumph at the success of his mole-like wanderings, all covered with dust, of course, and saw that he threw himself across the knees of Lockwood

in perfect childlike abandon. Presently he looked up into his face with a crafty sort of expression, and slipped his hand into the man's inner pocket, drawing therefrom a piece of candy which at once he began to lick and suck with familiar gusto.

Mrs. Mackintosh could not fail to be distressed at this performance, it betokened such evident familiarity on the part of the child with the man and the more so as Lockwood's connivance showed how utterly he had disregarded her entreaties in the matter.

As for Diantha, she would not have been human had she not followed where "fate, the starry-eyed one," was pointing her finger in answer to her wish to reveal to the citizens of Boulder how it was that Lockwood could bribe and control the child and make him do his bidding.

In no court in the world would the evidence of a child of four or five be admitted. But the evidence of one's senses gathered in the court could not be ignored. No one as yet had mentioned the name of Lockwood. All were waiting for something to come to pass, like a miracle, and lo and behold it was happening before their very eyes, thought Diantha to herself. She saw her chance in that second like a flash.

"As soon as I saw the gold was missing," she went on, "of course my suspicions came back to me that somebody had found out the combination from the number I had jotted down. It was a wild idea, I admit, for no man could have entered the tent reserved for the women, that would not have been permitted. But I knew that a child could have done so and could have taken the little hand-bag containing the much desired object

with it, to the man who wanted it. This conviction is forced on me by the fact that when I found my notebook, I knew it had been tampered with, because it was all sticky and sweet as if some one with sugary hands had been meddling with it."

"Such damned nonsense!" ejaculated Lockwood.

The justice asked her if she had any idea as to who it was that had been handling the book.

Diantha hesitated an instant. Should she stop proceedings to get Ellen to retire, should she pass over Tommy's part in the treachery against her and thus not clear herself? Or should she deal with the truth absolutely? She remembered how she and Colleen had conceded that the truth was too great a luxury to be indulged in at all times and places, but for once in her life she felt like being luxurious. She felt she had too much at stake to put the complacent adorings of a mistaken motherhood before her own defense.

She called to Tommy to come and see what she had in her bag. He had learned to obey her, however unwillingly, when she called him, so slowly he squirmed along to her side. She placed the little hand-bag of silk in his hands. "It is between Tommy and me," she was saying to herself.

Presently he pulled open the strings and felt inside, drawing out the little notebook from its maw, and turning suddenly, he gave Lockwood the most comical little grimace.

The halo-crowned little scamp then looked up at her and she said, by virtue of the influence she had gained over him, "Now, Tommy, be a good boy and tell me!

Did you put this little book safe back in the bag again, when you took it out yesterday, and after Barry gave it back to you?"

"Ess, me did," said he, stoutly.

"Oh, what a shame," Diantha could hear Ellen saying and it made her very unhappy, but she went on resolutely.

The book and the bag she gave into the hands of the judge and told him to notice how sticky they were from Tommy's second handling and also to observe the numbers on the last page, and asking that some one should try them on the safe.

Presently they all were putting this into effect, and the fact was established that the number worked the combination perfectly. Tommy was not in the least alarmed and went to his mother's arms as if he had just given a very cunning and clever performance. But poor Mrs. Mackintosh bowed her head over her idol and was at first covered with confusion. This, however, passed away and was followed by extreme haughtiness. Anger and pride struggled for the mastery in her maternal breast.

Diantha saw and suffered. All the more did she feel vengeful against Lockwood. His name had been mentioned at last. He had slightly recovered himself by this moment, and broke in, "What damned nonsense! Wasn't I out at Twin Lakes with everybody else? I can prove by the whole town I was there ever since Friday!"

"Go on, Miss March," said the judge, nodding to her encouragingly.

"Well," she said deliberately keeping the main point, "when Mr. Lockwood ran his horse against the horse of Mr. Quincy and knocked him off, we all thought it an accident, but now I am quite sure it was because John Quincy knew something about Mr. Lockwood he didn't want to have get out for everybody to know. He can tell you what that was if you ask him."

Diantha sat down. Everybody got as still as death, even Mrs. Mackintosh listened intently. John looked rather bewildered as he stood up to be questioned. It was evident he had not quite understood the drift of the evidence thus far given.

"I don't know that I know anything at all," he began innocently. However, he told about Lockwood's horse being covered with foam and mud and how he had said, "Why, Barry, somebody's been riding your horse while you were asleep," and how Lockwood had sworn at him for what he meant to be only a kindness as he did not like to see an animal abused. And later how Barry had tried to run him down but that he did not know why.

Diantha saw that in spite of this simple but effective evidence of John's, that there was one great stumbling-block still remaining in the fastening of the crime upon the one who was really guilty of it. If Lockwood was all night sleeping in the tent, how could he have gone to Boulder Camp and have robbed the safe? She did not know but even yet justice might fail. How cleverly he had designed the whole plot! She had to admit that he had great ability, like his uncle, Horace J. Lockwood, only that it had become perverted. She looked at Watson. If only he could be induced to tell what he knew

he could save her from this trap. But she realized that to do so, he would be putting himself into one.

To her surprise, Everton and Harris were standing one on each side of Watson and urging him to go forward and to testify for Miss March.

Presently there he was, standing before what must have been a dreadful tribunal to him, and some way it was pitiful, for he fairly shook in his fear and his voice was faint, as he answered the questions asked of him.

Lockwood burst out with an interruption that everybody knew Watson had been dismissed for stealing from the firm, that nobody would hang a snake on such testimony as his.

"Perhaps not a snake," said grizzled old Dow dryly, for all to hear.

"That's what," murmured a chorus of hoarse voices.

Thus encouraged Watson told his story. It came out bit by bit how Lockwood had contrived to cover his alibi out at Twin Lakes by having Watson take his place in the tent during the night, and upon his return, Watson meet him and take his horse while he resumed his old place.

Lockwood was at his old bluffing-game again, pouring out the vials of his wrath and scorn upon Watson for a liar and a thief. And although he kept declaring he would take this thing into a real court before a real judge, after they got through with all that "nonsense," he was ignored absolutely.

In answer to why Watson had lent himself to become the tool of Lockwood in this manner, and thus to permit suspicion to fall upon an innocent party, he told

them he would make a clean breast of the whole thing.

He was an honest man with a good reputation when first he had come to Boulder Camp. But Lockwood had threatened to make him lose his job unless he shut his eyes to what was going on. After the first mistake there was no going back. But he lost his job anyway and with his good name gone he could not get another. He told of how Lockwood had put up a job to mob the book-keeper from New York when he arrived, so he would get out again, and how he had given him the money to go around and get the men drunk so as to put it through.

"But when the young lady stepped out of the stage that night," he said brokenly, "we all felt awful. I watched to see what she would do with his efforts to get control of the books. But she threw the diamond-ring he gave her out into the road, and the roll of greenbacks he slipped into her room, she put back into the safe, so he could get no hold over her, and then he was going to punish her by threatening to kill Caspar, but she told him she would go away, if only he wouldn't do that."

The poor man stopped and wiped his clammy brow and the grizzled citizen gave him a drink of water before he could go on.

"And when I saw that this new game of his was going to put the blame on Miss March out of revenge because she was so honest, I couldn't stand for it, I was ashamed; for she has always treated me white! And my wife, too! I couldn't let the blame fall on her, not if I get killed for it; and Barry wouldn't mind it any more than if I was a dog."

"Do you believe a snivelling cur like that?" demanded

Lockwood. "If it weren't for my broken arm! That's right! knock me when I'm down."

Everton's explanation that Lockwood was a confirmed gambler and everyone knew it did not take long to turn a gambler into a thief, made Lockwood burst into a passionate fit of cursing and reviling.

"You've got to the end of your rope, man," said Dow, grimly. And then there came in some one dragging a long rail after him, and another carrying a pail, full of some strange dark stuff that looked like molasses, and a third one with two feather-pillows in his arms.

A low murmur of hoarse voices began to arise. But the judge waved for silence. "You are about the luckiest man I ever saw," said he, turning to Lockwood. "Now, these gentlemen had prepared a little surprise for you this evening, and if you hadn't got hurt a little earlier in the game, by this time you would have been seeing some fun."

Even Lockwood paled with fright at that fearsome sight. He knew what it meant to be tarred and feathered and ridden out of town on a rail.

There was a conference among the men gathered and then it was announced that as Miss March had been the one to suffer the most at the hands of Barry Lockwood, it would be left to her to decide what should be his sentence.

CHAPTER XXVI

BARRY LOCKWOOD'S FINAL WORD

“MISS MARCH, will you come forward?” said the judge; and, amid a clapping of hands, Diantha ventured into the midst of those bearded men, who were all her friends and protectors in that supreme moment.

Lockwood sat there like a rat in a cage. There was a furtive look in his red-rimmed eyes, and mingled rage and fear upon him.

Would she speak for the tar and feathers, or the stripes of prison?

But Diantha was a woman. No one there just then remembered she had been called in question on the first count, that of her honor as a bookkeeper; that had been cleared out of the way so instantly. But there were three men, Caspar, Everton and Harris, and one woman, Mrs. Mackintosh, who had heard this wretch try to rob her of her good name, and second count as it was, yet it was the great and unforgivable indictment of her honor as a woman. That was what she wanted cleared now, once and forever. Was there any way she could reach him, she thought, or was he only a human rat?

She thought of Schiller's lines,

“How can I so artfully arrange my cautious words
That they may touch but not offend your heart?”

She looked at him deliberately. "This country is too good for Mr. Lockwood," she said, significantly, "he does not deserve to have his freedom, and yet for the sake of his poor wife —"

He gave a gasp and made a protest as he glared at her sullenly.

"And his poor unfortunate children," she went on relentlessly, "I could wish there was some other country to which he could be sent, in order to save them, these innocent ones, from the disgrace of his being sent to prison. Is there any place you can think of," she said, turning to the judge, "where men sometimes escape to, in cases like this? Is China, do you think that China would do?"

"Well," said the grizzled citizen, "I'd be sorry for China, that's all."

Lockwood still looked at Diantha with a dull gaze. How had she kept this knowledge of his family to herself all this time? But he blustered that this was only child's play, and he would bring it to a real trial in a real court when they got through with their nonsense.

But the judge assured him they were all in grim earnest.

"What?" cried the man with the pail, "ain't we going to give him a coat of tar and feathers, that's what we're here for!"

"You have your choice," said Everton to Lockwood. "Either there will be a warrant out for your arrest to-morrow morning or you will take the next steamer for China, I'll see you up the gang-plank myself to make sure of it!"

"Hold on," came a hoarse voice above the din, "he doesn't get off as easy as that! He's got to apologize! He hasn't done it yet, but he shall do it before he leaves this room, as sure as my name is Caspar Rhodes!"

Diantha began to get faint. It seemed to her that the whole terrible business was about to begin all over again. Mrs. Mackintosh and Miss Read were for starting for the door, worn out with all the excitement of that day and night, but Caspar waved them back.

"It is a matter of principle with me," he exclaimed, clear and ringing for all to hear, "to put a thing through when I have begun it. You must all stay and hear Mr. Lockwood's apology."

"You are right, Caspar," said Everton, "it will take only a moment."

There was something about Lockwood still unconquered though he had been uncovered in all his ignominy. He sat there before a roomful of his fellow-citizens disgraced forever, yet no shame was his.

Yet Diantha could see a different expression in those red-rimmed eyes of his as he met her gaze. Would he yield and make decent reparation for the wrong he had done her? Or would he add more insult to the evil he had tried to work? It was evident that if he wanted to save every bone in his body from being broken that he had better agree to the requirement made of him. Yet he seemed more puzzled over her than submitting to the fearsome alternative. Even he had to recognize the splendid quality of womanhood in her, low as he was and base as he was. He had never had any discipline, he was still the anarchist of childhood, yet in

spite of this there was something new entering his brain, it was a gleam of respect compelled from him, for a woman who could stand as she stood, on the transcendent heights of probity and honesty beyond all price. Only one tiny shadow of doubt lingered with him.

Presently he spoke what was in his mind, and asked her to tell him why it was that she and Everton had pretended not to be very well acquainted when he arrived. She assured him it was not pretence, it was only embarrassment.

"Well, then," he continued, dryly, "why was it that you and Everton were so embarrassed that night when he came? And if you will tell me the truth about it, why, I will — yes, I will apologize."

He did not take her by surprise as he expected he would in putting her to this test.

"Certainly, I will," she replied promptly. "In the first place, I did not know Mr. Everton when he arrived till I heard his voice, for he had grown a beard and I thought him a stranger. In the second place, I knew I should not be free to answer him when he should ask me about the books because of my understanding with you."

"With me?" ejaculated Lockwood.

"Yes," she continued, "it is true I had made friends with you for a purpose, just as I would with a madman to prevent bloodshed, nevertheless I was not going to be the one to betray you, I was going to hold to my compact. But you were afraid I would not, and sitting there on the veranda, do you remember, you asked me to use my influence for you, and in return for your con-

tinued friendship, you demanded my silence as to what had happened. I agreed to that, still desiring to prevent bloodshed, and now," her voice quivered with the intense emotion of the moment, "in spite of everything you have done, have I not kept my word?"

He looked at her through half-veiled lids studying her.

"Yes,— I suppose you — have," he said slowly, "such as it is — and you did keep your mouth shut." He seemed to be turning it over in his mind.

Somehow they all felt that a single word more would break the spell. They simply waited, but the force of that silence was all potent.

"I apologize," he said, finally, and then he added in a different tone, "but I wouldn't do it if I didn't think you're a smart woman, that's what you are! — damned honest, and I don't mind saying, you are a lady!"

Caspar took one arm to draw him away, and Stanley stood on his other side.

He looked from the one to the other in a dogged sort of way with those upturned corners to his lips, in a mocking smile, and spoke out for all to hear. "But I'll be blamed if I can tell which of you it is that she is going to marry."

CHAPTER XXVII

DIANTHA MEDITATES FOR THREE THOUSAND MILES

AS Diantha sat in the fast-flying train on her way back to New York gazing at the swift passing scenes of country, she was filled with a strange unrest. "Where do I stand?" she kept asking herself, as if the very foundations of her world were toppling about her.

"I used to have serious ideas about things, I used to be resolute, but something has happened to me and the worst of it is I am getting weak and cowardly, I am getting to know what *fear* means."

You cannot know much about any woman's life by reading one chapter out of it. This chapter in Boulder Camp revealed one side of her nature, but there were other chapters to follow, and until they all were summed up not even she herself could know exactly the kind of a woman Diantha March was.

From time immemorial have women loved the conqueror. Thus did the British women when the invading hosts arrived one after another, the Roman, the Saxon, the Dane, and out of this love of theirs has been evolved the present British race. When Attila and his Tartar hordes swept across Europe, the Teutonic women loved these fierce victors, and from this love came the new races of Austria and Hungary. The Aztec women loved the mighty Spaniard, hence the Mexican race. One of these

women of a later date broke off her betrothal with one of her own people to whom she was really attached, to wed instead, a French artist who had come to Mexico in the train of the ill-fated Maximilian.

"And why," she was asked, years after.

"Because," she proudly replied, "I thought I should become the mother of a new race."

It was something of this primordial instinct in Diantha that had made her go upon that venture of hers to the West. She had hoped to find her conqueror, for during that chapter of her life nothing less would have satisfied her. That Caspar was her conqueror she was only too well aware.

She loved him as a primordial woman might the lover who had knocked her down with his club and had carried her off to his cave, overcome by the recognition of his prowess in having made a success of the performance. He was fascinating but she was beginning to be doubtful about the change that was coming over herself. Why should she be afraid of any one, much less the man she loved? It was because she had done things of which she was ashamed, because in the city she had become hardened to things which were not nice to the eyes of a pure, simple-minded man. That was the root of the whole matter. What a terrible thought to think that Caspar was perhaps too good for her? She resented the suspicion in an agony of heartache. Yet this was the very man she had dreamed of and prayed to meet and to know. He had restored her faith in all mankind and she adored him.

But Caspar in New York City was a new thought to

her. It was not his habitat, not his element; maybe he would get hardened to things there, too, in time, and then they should stand on the same plane. She hoped so at any rate. She had no fears about his rusticity; who cared for a few veneerings of custom? They meant nothing to her, she would be prepared for such little crudities as infractions of etiquette, the more the better! If she had something to forgive, then he would have to forgive her, she thought, taking comfort from the idea.

What sort of a scheme had Mr. Everton in his mind that he had arranged this transporting of Caspar to city-life? She pondered. Surely he did not think she was going to hold him to that absurd proposition of his that if she found her elemental man he was to give her a thousand dollars and if he himself were persuaded that the man she had found was all that he had stipulated that he would make it five? She had already repudiated the idea, he could not make her hold to an absurd proposition like that. And never would she permit Caspar to hear of such a bargain as that even made in jest. Why, he would scorn her so she would shiver in shame before him. "He could never be made to understand how such a thing as that could arise even in jest," she said to herself. "It must be kept from him forever, it is this that is giving me this sickening sensation of fear, that he will find out this and how I have deceived him."

She was almost angered at Everton for his insistence on the bet. Underneath every thought, like a monotonous drumbeat came the recurrent idea of Everton, dominating everything. She owed him so much that she was forced

to do him justice. How finely he had stood out, among all the men of Boulder, as an organizer, as a clever tactician. In that way she had to admit he was a kind of Colossus. He was simply splendid.

When she thought of the strange glance he had given her at the festival, when Caspar was behaving like a bear and insisting that the precious document she had received, expressing the approval of the citizens of Boulder, was a work of supererogation, she had felt puzzled. That look had conveyed the eloquence of understanding.

It almost seemed as if he could not be the same man she had known in New York. It aroused in her a feeling that she might have done him an injustice. What if he had been in earnest that day in the office and had really meant what he said?

But she roused herself and insisted that her intuitions told her that he was only acting a part. "And what have I intuitions for if not to be warned by them for my own good?" Yet she admitted to herself that she would be inclined to doubt the evidence of her own senses so far as Everton was concerned, had it not been for the tragic mistake of a girl she had known in the city who had warned her not to be deceived as she had been.

Poor Rosa had believed in a man's protestations, and had given up a musical career to marry him, because he frantically had declared he would go to the devil if she did not, and she found out afterwards that he was not even in love with her. When six months later she asked him why he had insisted on marrying her, the

wretch had replied, "That he did not mean a word that he had said, but that he kept it up because he got started and thought it was expected of him."

"Talk about women being mysterious and incomprehensible!" continued Diantha to herself. "She is big print compared to the workings of the brain and the heart of the male-being who dominates earth. He is the one who remains the unknown and the unknowable. So with this bit of valuable information in my possession I shall not give myself the least worry about Stanley Everton and his feelings toward me.

"It is true he has paid me the greatest compliment a man can pay a woman. But I think it very likely if it had not been Diantha March that afternoon last May, it would have been some other girl. He was in the mood for proposing at that particular hour, and probably, like that other man, thinks he is expected to stick to it."

With this conclusion she tried to banish him from her mind altogether. Yet in spite of her determination not to worry about him, he haunted her unceasingly. Out of her gratitude to him she wanted to do him justice. She remembered with emotion that night when she had found the safe robbed. Even as Caspar, he had resented Lockwood's insult to her, and together they had punished him. Together? That was the strange part of it, they seemed to like each other and now when they should arrive in New York together, what was going to happen? She had almost forgotten her escape from her difficulties, the persecutions of Lockwood, in the face of this new portent looming large before her.

In a few days she would be putting foot to the New York pavements again, seeing the Pleiades girls of whom she was so fond. There would be Showery, pale but hopeful over her musical engagements, prospective as usual; Seddie, with her clever sketches now in demand after all her agonies; Anna, Colleen's young cousin just from Canada to study domestic science, who was only nineteen, and the "ewe-lamb" of the little fold. Restless and eager would be poor Gene Lenore, now writing for the Sunday Flyer, after all her terrible struggles to get on in the great city. Last but yet first would be dear Colleen with her moonlit face, so serene, and her deep-blue eyes with black lashes, and her heart of gold, the little mother of them all, in spite of her own daily duties as a bread-winner.

There were Vivian and her husband, Howard, she so dark and he so fair.

Howard and Stanley seemed to be great friends as well as to have business relations. A suspicion touched her mind for an instant that they two might have some scheme against Caspar to put through, but she dismissed it on the second, in her desire to do Everton justice.

She tried to banish thought for the morrow and to take what the gods sent, the great joy of seeing Caspar again and of coming under the spell of that wonderful smile of his. She thought of him, his red lips so firmly held, his high cheek-bones, the heavy dark beard, and then she sighed. She remembered how Vivian used to sing,

"Love's slavery is sweet."

And now she knew what it meant. Then there came

to her another thing she had heard from the same source. It was a fierce little saying of Vivian's, when she thought she was heartbroken over another man, before she had met Howard. And presently it adapted its rhythm to fit the metre of the hoarse music of the car as it flew along, across the continent, its wheels striking the rails in a peculiar time of its own.

"We do not need — we do not need — to die — to die — to find hell — to find — find hell — it is right here — right here — on earth — on earth — and love is put in — love is put in — to make it — to make it — all the worse — put in to make it all the worse."

She knew what that meant, too. If she were not so madly in love with Caspar, she would not now be as afflicted with these dreadful sensations of fear and remorse.

CHAPTER XXVIII

CASPAR WALKS UP FIFTH AVENUE AND DOWN BROADWAY

TO the returned New Yorkers, nothing was more beautiful nor splendid than to behold the city once again in that joyous September, to enter into the glory of her uplifted architecture, to hear her great voice in the streets, above and all about in the ceaseless traffic, to become a part of all the pulsation of her three million souls.

Quincy had declared it was like heaven to see dear old New York again. Everton had congratulated himself on tasting its electrical atmosphere with the old thrill of delight, and even Diantha March sighed with content at setting foot to the pavement as of yore. To them the shield presented the golden side, more fascinating than ever before because of their brief absence. They had already come under the spell of her enchantment, and saw only her splendor and beauty.

To Caspar's fresh eyes, however, the great city presented an almost sinister aspect. To his ears, sensitive to the fall of a leaf on the mountain-side, the noises combined to make a hideous din. To his delicate nostrils the noisome city-odors came as a warning of impurity. To his inner senses for which there is no adequate term, there entered an intuitive comprehension of the sordid lives of the masses of beings who jostled

and pushed him about regardless of rights or manners, to say nothing of life or limb.

"Lord of Heavens! what a place to be poor in," was his first thought. For he remembered how, out in the open, if Fortune should prove unkind there, that one could build himself a shack and be covered from the elements, find free water in the hills, and free food by the use of hook and gun, and yet remain a man! But here, it was poverty of spirit as well as of purse that was exacted! It meant that one in the city would have to live the life of a cur and beg for food to maintain a worthless existence. Even more than by the pitiable creatures that he saw idly sitting in the parks, was he impressed by the smug faces of the parasites who lived by serving the bodily needs of the inordinately rich.

The sky-scrapers seemed to him horrible, at first, shutting off the sun from the earth below, and he reckoned that in the winter, the pigmies walking as at the bottom of a well, were denied man's birthright, in that they could never see more than one star at a time, if even they lifted their eyes that far. Worst of all was the overwhelming loneliness of the pitiless metropolis. It crept upon him like a chill to think of the unseeing eyes about him, each going his or her way and no one caring, no one revealing any human emotion. He could himself perceive how hardened every one was, and he knew it was contagious—that in time he, too, would take on this hardened self, and the thought overwhelmed him.

That Caspar was justified in these impressions arises from the fact that his arrival in the great city was in

that year of grace, when deaths from violence, from traffic, fires, collapsing buildings, cavings of embankments, and explosions, had rendered the people almost insensible to the value of human life so long as they were able to find themselves alive at the end of the day. In addition to this, the fortunes made and lost in a day on Wall Street, had rendered hundreds of thousands of the population grim and desperate. Luxury and false living were claiming their victims as well as overwork and grappling with the wolf at the door. Unrest was everywhere and Caspar could feel it in the very air.

He was even a little distrustful of Everton and his friend Howard. But he resisted that thought; for he knew in his heart that Everton was his friend, or he would never have invited him to come East and give him this opportunity to better himself as he had done. Old Lockwood, the senior partner, was not to be in town for a few days, so that the matter had to wait till his consent should be obtained, and he was told to take a few days' holiday. That his suspicion of Howard must be unjust he knew; for surely his wife, the black-haired little lady, would not have invited him to call in such a hospitable manner, otherwise.

He tried to banish this pessimistic mood creeping on, and to try to see New York with Diantha's eyes instead, Diantha, his sweetheart, with whom he was to walk up Fifth Avenue and see the sights. He stood waiting for her, according to arrangement, at the great Flatiron Building.

As for Diantha, she tried to be very happy on this beautiful September morning. That the girls had raved

over Quincy and had ignored Caspar had puzzled her at first. She tried to think back to the moment when first her eyes had fallen upon him. She had gone to him straight, heart and all, out of that mob of men brandishing clubs and firing pistols as to one she had known at once she could trust. That was her answer she thought. It took a moment like that to reveal his true worth if only by contrast with the rest of the men in the world generally.

That she had suffered, she knew; and that it was not all over yet, she felt prophetically. But in her peculiar mood, all the fault the girls had found with Caspar the night before, only added to her satisfaction. She was glad he had some faults, that he pronounced his "r's" hard, that he bit his bread instead of breaking it, that he folded his napkin, she hoped he would do more things so that she would have something to forgive in him, when it came to the time for confessing her own great fault, her deception of himself. It was going to come out all right, eventually, she assured herself. It must. So she endeavored to dismiss the fear from her heart and enjoy what the gods sent.

There was no reason, however, why Caspar should not be smoothed down and trimmed a little, as Colleen had suggested, so as to look less old and less peculiar to the eyes of those who did not comprehend his splendid virtues and qualities. Everybody had to conform in the city in order to escape notice. She knew he hated to hear about style as much as she did, so she decided to approach the subject, gently and cautiously.

There he was standing awaiting her, and she could

see the gladness on his face and feel the joy in his heart, as she approached him. She felt a thrill go through her. She and Caspar in New York City together! And she thought of Everton, who had brought it all about — she was always thinking of him!

They two went on their way, walking up Fifth Avenue, looking into the windows as they passed, at the paintings, and Oriental vases, and splendid works of art that gravitate here from all the centers of the art-world, when she decided to make a beginning to her efforts.

“That’s a fine thing,” said Caspar, standing in admiration before a Russian war-picture showing a spirited scene of Cossacks galloping into battle. “That’s a canvas I’d like to own.”

“You have splendid taste, Caspar,” said Diantha, smiling with pleasure to see that he knew a good picture without being told. “I’d like that myself. I wonder how much it is.” And she led the way into the art-exhibition, but Caspar remained outside, gazing after her in astonishment. She returned, urging him to come in and see the other pictures. “It is a free exhibition,” she explained, and he followed but rather unwillingly.

He looked after Diantha, who tall and confident stepped to the manager, with all the poise gained by her years in the city, and inquired the price of the painting they had admired, as if she were to command haughtily that it be sent out to the carriage at once.

When she had returned to his side she told him it could be had for three hundred dollars, as it was not by an old master, fortunately, “but it is twice as good,” she said laughingly.

The more embarrassed he became, the more she waxed confidential.

"Now, Caspar, I have always thought that when I went to housekeeping, that I would buy one good painting and just make the furniture up, out of boxes and barrels, covered with blue denim, and, with some shelves and a blue jar or two, the house would be furnished; and I think this is the very painting I have had in mind all the time. Suppose we get it this morning? Wouldn't it be grand? But what is the matter, Caspar? Don't you like the idea?"

No wonder she came to her senses suddenly; for he was showing all his amazement in his eyes without speaking a word. "Yes, I like the idea," he said huskily, at last, and then could get no further.

Diantha took a full breath. She had forgotten the part she had to play—that she was as poor as himself. She smiled anxiously, as she assured him that she was not in earnest, only joking. She gritted her teeth together to think how nearly she had betrayed herself, and led the way out faster than she had come in.

"Whatever put it into your head, Diantha, that we could afford to buy a three-hundred dollar painting to go to housekeeping with?" persisted Caspar, to whom the idea of its being a joke was rather puzzling. "I'm afraid living in the city has given you luxurious tastes, and, by the way, I'd like to ask some questions about things generally."

"Very well," said Diantha, with assumed gayety, though inwardly protesting, "I don't want him to find me out or I may lose him forever."

The old lumbering omnibus, remnant of the past, came rolling up the Avenue and gave her an inspiration for the moment to avert further revelations. "O Caspar, there are two places on top the bus," she cried and hailed it as she spoke. Presently they were mounting to the elevation that seemed on a line with the second stories of the houses.

Caspar laughed delightfully at the wonderful point-of-view which made the people seem like manikins below them. Diantha told him to hold his hot hands up and let the cool air blow through them. As usual he took off his hat and his shaggy hair waved in the breeze and that lock fell into his eyes, yet his mind persisted in reverting to their broken-off conversation.

"I want to know about your Pleiades Hall," he began. "How did it all come about? Who pays for everything?"

"Why, we do," replied Diantha, smiling again, relieved that the picture-episode had dropped from his ken. He suggested that the rent must be very high, but she assured him the higher up the flat without any elevator, the lower the rent was. He wanted to know all about everything; and Diantha explained how the six girls co-operated and how it cost them each about five dollars a week. Then he wanted to know who bossed the "ranch" and kept things going so smoothly.

"Oh, that's Colleen," responded Diantha, "she owns the furniture and we pay her for our use of it."

"Not that sweet-looking girl with the pretty mouth and teeth?" asked he.

"Why, Caspar!" exclaimed Diantha, delightedly,

"did you see her as plain as all that! Of course, that's Colleen. You know she is a compatriot of mine. She is the private secretary of a professor at Columbia, that's the college, you know."

Caspar pushed the hair from his eyes and declared that they all were the most remarkable young women he had ever heard of. "To think of you all coming down here from that bleak old Canada and finding positions and setting up housekeeping like that for a little over twenty a month each."

"We're not all from old bleak Canada," said Diantha, sweetly, "Seddie is from the 'Sooth,' that is the way she pronounces it, and Gene is from the Middle-West, Kansas, and Showery is from Maine. Vivian used to be with us, and she was from California; so you see we are a representative set of girls."

"Pretty clever," mused Caspar, "I approve of the whole batch of you!" And he gave her a smile that was most ingenuous and boyish in its admiration.

"Let sleeping lions lie," is a good proverb. But Diantha was moved on the instant to think of the girls and their criticisms of him the night before. And she wanted the girls to admire him as much as he admired them. But those waving locks of hair stood in the way of their being able to see him correctly.

So gently she made her way, and finally ventured to suggest that he would be much more comfortable in the September sun if he had his hair and beard trimmed. Caspar was rather fretful over the idea. "Oh, the miserable stuff!" he exclaimed, "does it need shearing again? It keeps me poor I can tell you, attending to it.

I had it cut last month and here it is, all grown out again."

She saw an opportunity not to be missed and suggested that when he went to the barber that he have his hair parted higher, so as to avoid the cowlick which made it stand up so fractiously, that the outline of his head would be better with it parted nearer the top.

"Nearer the top," repeated Caspar grimly, "you are not thinking of making me into a sissy-boy, I hope."

She assured him that he suited her exactly as he was, but that the girls were so funny, they had an idea that he was an old man just because he had such a lot of hair and beard. He seemed astonished at such an idea and observed he had always thought that old men were bald.

"Just what I told them," she said with a superior air. "But you can't do anything with silly girls. They thought you looked like a hermit, you know, one of those old codgers who lives in the desert with locusts and wild honey," she added wickedly.

"Good gracious, is it as bad as that?" said he, half-laughing, yet not amused at all. For Caspar had been compelled to view life seriously. What he had earned, had had to serve for four instead of one. As he could not increase the earnings, he had learned to have less needs and thus it had sufficed.

Pride and poverty together contrive, from much suffering to produce a man, just as the gardener, by much pruning and grafting produces a new rose. But who shall say the rose does not suffer in the process, as well as does the human-creature in becoming a man?

Far away from the centers of civilization, where a

man was a man, irrespective of clothes and fashion, Caspar had found it possible to survive because he could reduce his needs. In the great city it was not possible, he must conform. He was sensitive to ridicule. He could feel that he was at the mercy of some great monster who demanded his poor little substance which was only another word for heart's blood after all.

Behind the counters and the countinghouses, and ruling over all the ships that go to sea, and above wars, and behind ambassadors and over thrones and potentates, stands the great Earth-Giant, and his name is Trade. He is busy by day and by night, never closing his eyes, reducing men to civilization and unifying them by means of fashion. His one object is to create needs—to do away with nature.

How then should Caspar hope to escape? An hour later he walked down the street meditatively. There were smouldering fires banked away beneath that self-control of his. His heart had none the less yearned for a little of the sweetness that others enjoyed, and like a torturing delight had come Diantha into his life. Was it not enough that she had upset his head and introduced the tantalus of love into his thoughts? He felt he must maintain his balance on the economies still, or ruin altogether would supervene.

Yet as he went along down Broadway, he found himself, for the first time in his life glancing at the image of himself in the mirrors of the store-windows as among those of the passing crowds. He saw the shagginess of his hair and his beard and the loose fit of his clothes

and knew that he looked quite different from them all. He resolved that something must be done. He would not have those girls of Pleiades Court laughing at him any longer.

CHAPTER XXIX

CASPAR GIVES EVERYBODY A SURPRISE

THERE was a great buzzing and a quick stepping of light feet on the floor highest up of Pleiades Court; for the clans were to gather that night and be entertained by the poets and the philosophers. And the Pleiades girls knew from experience that the lesser lights and the greater poets and philosophers as well, would require earth-nourishment after the banquet of the gods was over.

"Do hurry up, Diantha," cried Colleen, "you sit there beating that salad-dressing as if you were in a dream and there are all these berries yet to be picked. There's no use expecting that slow poke of a Katy Johnson to do anything but wash the dishes."

"I wish I could make that salad," said Anna, who was just fresh from Canada. "Where did you learn how, Colleen?"

"I was taught by the broken-hearted wife of a bigamist. You have to have a broken-heart to make it just right, I can never make it as fine as she did," returned Colleen.

"Was she the first or the second wife," asked Anna full of wonder at such things, "and where did you meet her?"

"She was the second, of course, the first wife doesn't

get broken-hearted, she's only too glad to get rid of the beast; and the poor thing lived next door to our flat, and she cried so at night, we couldn't sleep. So that's what comes from being in love with the wrong man. Tell that Katy Johnson to carry away these things."

The bell rang and presently entered a small trim figure crowned with masses of blue-black hair. "Oh, it's Vivian! it's Vivian!" went up the cry. "And what have you named the auto?"

"Oh, I call it 'The Gentle Gazelle,'" said she laughing, "but Howard insists on calling it 'The Meteor.' How are you getting on, girls?" She drew off her gloves revealing clusters of pearls and diamonds sparkling on her long slender hands. "Can I do anything to help? Give me an apron; for I've got on my butterfly gown."

True enough, the front breadth of her silken gown was covered with pink and black butterflies and also her corsage and her hair as if a flock of the pretty things had alighted on her full winged for an instant's stay. Soon she was swathed in an all-embracing apron, cutting sandwiches at the table and telling the news in a dignified, almost matronly manner.

"Dear me," said Diantha, "how marriage has improved you, Vivian. I can remember when you came to New York, a child-prodigy, singing those folklore songs of yours so divinely to the public and carrying on like a little tempest behind the scenes with your poor mother."

"Oh, yes, I did have a bad temper in those days, but you know I thought I had a broken heart and that there was nothing left worth living for." At this confession

she smiled comically as if greatly amused. "But I found out it wasn't love at all, it was just chills and fever! Oh, what I used to weep at in those days, I just laugh at now!"

But the bell had rung and the girls all scampered to put on the finishing touches. Colleen was the first to meet the incomer, a stranger, a handsome young man, with smooth face, clear skin and white forehead, in a stylish summer suit and with a straw hat in his hand.

He went into the front room, took a chair behind the piano and sat down. The other girls, appearing at this moment, eyed him with suspicion.

He seemed aware of some word necessary in explanation and said, "I would like to see Miss March, and I would like to see her alone."

A hush fell upon them for an instant and then there was a sudden flight as of frightened quail disappearing. Vivian remained, however, to make the stranger feel at home.

"Diantha," whispered Colleen at the door of her room, "do hurry! there is a man who wants to see you."

"A man?" inquired Diantha, calmly, "what kind of a man?"

"Some stranger we never saw before," said Gene, a little wickedly.

As she came out, a shining white goddess of a girl with her eyes very dark and her hair very bright, she said, "Don't be so mysterious and scared, strangers don't eat one, I hope."

As Diantha entered the room, Vivian passed her by leaving her there without a word of explanation. She

saw before her a strikingly handsome young man, with curling hair parted in the center, an athletic figure in a light gray suit. She noted in a flash all these things. Where had she ever seen anybody like him before? Then he smiled at her filling all the room with sunshine, and she recognized something familiar in the even line of the white teeth, and became hopelessly embarrassed.

"I asked to see you alone," said a most familiar voice, "and now we can have a little talk."

"Caspar?" she gasped,—“Mr. Rhodes!”

"Why, what is the matter?" he asked innocently. "I assure you it is only my clothes that make me look so foolish."

"Foolish?" she echoed, "no wonder the girls said it was a stranger!"

"I thought they seemed a little offish," he said, utterly unconscious of the change in himself because his looks had been altered, "but now we can have a little chat."

But Diantha's embarrassment clung to her still. Some way she could not forgive his being so splendid and different from the Hercules of a Caspar she knew and loved. It was as an elemental man he had won her. She did not want him to be a fashion-plate, the same as every other man. What if it were true that all men were alike after all? She was afraid of him. She did not know where she stood. She had a kind of a stage-fright that upset her understanding completely.

But Diantha could act a part when it was forced on her, even though she had been shaken to her heart's core. Her shaggy rumpled bear was gone and this youth

was there in his place, but she must not let any one know how she felt about it.

Others began to arrive and in the hall Colleen smiled at her and said, "It took you to know a fairy prince, even though he was disguised in a bear-skin." She was willing to let them take that view of it.

The first thing on arriving, Howard Rose began looking about for a glimpse of the shaggy westerner against whom he had placed his bet with Stanley Everton. "I don't see him," he said, *sotto voce*, to his friend.

"Ask Quincy if he is coming."

Everton leaned over and asked John the question.

"Don't you see him, don't you know him?" exclaimed the tall youth in hilarious glee, "I tell you it takes dear old New York," but the rest of it was lost.

The two glanced where he indicated to the splendid young fellow sitting modestly still behind the piano, out of every one's way.

"Well, I'll be —" exclaimed Howard. Then his mood changed from that of surprise to that of resentment. "Spoiled all my fun, too; he owes me something for that!"

Everton was absolutely startled. "Caspar!" he exclaimed, "who would have ever believed it? I might as well give up — this ends it for me." And though he tried to smile his face took on a tinge of melancholy.

"Hold on, Stanley," said his champion, "don't be so sure. I told you I didn't believe this westerner of Diantha's was all she thought him, and, by Jove, I don't think so yet. He's got to prove it, that's all. We've got our bets on him and he's got to abide by it."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Everton, fixedly.

"I say he is without proper grit, without 'the sand,' and that he'll squeal when he is hurt, and because he is shaved and shows he has got good features doesn't alter anything. If he's the elemental man, he'll stand for it, whiskers or no whiskers. Besides we owe it to Diantha to let her see just exactly what kind of a fellow he is."

"What do you mean to do?" asked Everton slowly.

"I mean to give him a good scare and see what he'll do. If he is a man and takes it all right I'll be his friend as long as I live."

A false elation of spirits seemed to be urging Diantha on to the most reckless introductions of the guests as they arrived. She made a great point of the entrance of a most harmless looking elderly lady of no address whatever. "Permit me, ladies and gentlemen, to make you acquainted with my friend, Mrs. Josh," she said sweepingly, "the greatest club-woman in New York City."

It was, however, a moment of real triumph when the two great electric arc-lights of splendor shone upon the Pleiades girls, the apostles of Henry George. Yes, they had both come, it was almost too good to be true.

Diantha placed one upon each side of Mr. Everton to let him see that she considered him to be the honored guest of the evening. And how delightfully he greeted them. It was a proud moment for them all. The evening passed as on wings. After the delicious repast, which every one enjoyed, they all went up on the roof of Pleiades Court.

"Our roof," was what they called it because they were

the nearest to it of any other floor in the great caravan-sary. The lanterns were bobbing about in the summer breeze most charmingly, like an Oriental scene, and the lights of the city stretched out before and about them endlessly, and an orchestra near was making the air sweet with sound, and every one was delighted.

Just once Diantha forgot her part. That was when she perceived a lone figure standing, gazing off on the house-tops from a dark corner of the roof, silhouetted against the sky. It was a strong splendid profile and a vigorous athletic form. As she looked at him, she forgot all else. What was it he reminded her of? It was a poem entitled "The Sower."

"Not his the lurchings of an aimless clod,
For with the august gesture of a god —
A gesture that is question and command —
He hurls the bread of nations from his hand:
And in the passion of the gesture flings
His fierce resentment in the face of kings."

Yes, he could have posed for a statue of "The Sower," especially the resentment part of it, she thought to herself.

Colleen came at this minute to say that the Apostles of Single Tax were going and the roof-party broke up suddenly.

CHAPTER XXX

CASPAR DISCOVERS THE USE OF THE COAL-BOX

IN the midst of the farewells, Howard and Vivian were insistent upon having Diantha and Caspar to dine with them the next night.

"I want him to take a try at 'The Meteor,' with me in the afternoon," said Howard.

"You mean 'The Gentle Gazelle,'" corrected Vivian.

It was all arranged in a moment and the Pleiades girls were to come also in the evening, and bring their young men with them.

John Quincy still hung around trying to find out if the girls would like him better without the beard he had brought back with him from the West. But they said no, they thought he would look too much like a boy.

"Boys are so irresponsible and so vapid," said Gene mischievously.

He turned to little Anna, who had only lately come among them, and asked, "What kind do you like best?"

She gave him a shy glance from her soft fawn-like eyes and replied, "Oh, we all prefer elemental men," as if she had learned it out of a new catechism.

John looked puzzled. "How do you go to work to get that way?" he asked.

"Oh, you be strong, strong enough to carry your sweetheart over a river, like Caspar did Diantha," said Anna, sagely.



From the roof, all solitary and alone, came Caspar, the hero of the river, in no pleasant frame of mind. Indeed he was boiling with resentment. Rivers were well enough in their way, but roofs in New York were abominable. He had found them so. His sweetheart had not come near him the whole evening, and he had been to such trouble to try to please her and these frivolous girls of Pleiades Court.

Yet under his wrath he was suffering. "I would like to see Diantha, Miss March," he said to Colleen in a voice of entreaty, "just a minute before I go."

"Why, certainly," cried Colleen yearning over him; for she could feel that he was unhappy. "I'll get her at once. Why, where is she?"

Impatiently he stood waiting, hat in hand, with Showery and Gene and Seddie half afraid of him and yet trying to make the awkward moment pass somehow.

Colleen came at last. "She says she will never see you again," and Colleen's voice was tremulous, feeling sorry for the splendid young fellow nobody seemed able to understand.

"What?" exclaimed Caspar in a room-filling explosion of sounds! "Where is she?"

Meekly Colleen led the way. "I didn't dare oppose him," she said afterwards to the girls, "or he might have smashed the furniture."

Stopping at the entrance to the sacred bower where Diantha had hid herself, deterred by his respect for her from doing as he desired in the matter, he said, "Just ask her to come to the door." He stood close,

however, with his foot almost holding the door from being closed again.

"You never saw such a sight," said Colleen afterwards. "When finally I persuaded Diantha to go to the door to say 'Good-night' to the poor fellow — for she did neglect him outrageously — what do you think he did?"

Nobody could guess.

"Well, he simply reached out one of those long arms of his like a great claw and hooked her out of the room. Then he took her to the coal-box in the hall there and made her tell him what was the matter. Wasn't it splendid? Why, he is the nicest man I ever saw in my life. No wonder Diantha loves him so!"

To this they all agreed and John Quincy went on his way home thinking what was to hinder him from being elemental also.

Out in the hall, dimly lighted, sat the two.

"Now," Caspar was saying, "what is the matter? Why did you say you would never see me again?" But he never relaxed the hold of that strong arm about her, lest she vanish at any moment.

She began to feel penitent for causing him so much unnecessary pain.

"Because my Caspar was gone and it seemed to me you were just the same as — a total stranger."

"Is that all?" His voice was very stern.

She admitted it was.

They arranged to walk home the following night from Vivian's together. Then, in the dim light of the hall, she felt the smooth face of the total stranger press against

her cheek, and a terrific crush of her mouth ensue and a bearlike hug from those long arms that almost threatened to break every bone in her body. He vanished so immediately that she could hardly hold up her own weight, and there the girls found her sitting still in a dream with her eyes shining like two stars.

It was a new sensation in Pleiades, top floor.

"Well, that old coal-box is now sanctified to romance," said Gene in her offhand way.

"My, isn't he splendid!" said Showery, who seldom approved of men. "He makes me think of somebody standing in the wheat-field, only there was nobody there at all, only the figment of the girl's imagination."

They were hushed for a moment.

Then Seddie spoke up. "But did you notice that he has just bought a new straw hat, and it is the Seventeenth of September. That isn't being very clever, is it? Nobody in the city wears them after the Fifteenth. Caspar may be all right in a wheat-field or a forest, but he's got a lot to learn before he can be a New Yorker."

"As if that were of the least consequence in the world," said Diantha lightly.

The next afternoon at three, Caspar was seated beside Howard in "The Meteor," alias "The Gentle Gazelle," and speeding down Broadway for the ferry.

A quizzical little smile was playing covertly about the lips of the fair-haired man as they crossed to Staten Island on the ferryboat, and from the water's edge up the broad roadway that lay through the Silver Lake course.

"I turned her loose," he afterwards told Stanley, "and

I nearly ran off the island once, but with all her skylarkings and fancy stunts, 'The Meteor' doing her best, he never turned a hair. And when we got to the house, he told my wife he had been a little suspicious at first that I was intending to scare him, but when he saw what a masterhand I was at handling the machine, that he knew he was perfectly safe."

"Caspar is all right," said Mr. Everton.

CHAPTER XXXI

CASPAR IN WALL STREET

WHEN Caspar entered the office of Lockwood and Everton, the following morning, he had very small hopes of winning the approval of the senior partner, to whom he was to be introduced. The night before, he had told Diantha that he would be glad when the ordeal was over, and he should find himself free to go his own way again. That he knew he was not adapted to mingling with city people, and the sooner he returned to the West the happier he would be.

It was with no concern, therefore, that he entered the presence of the great man, Horace J. Lockwood, and submitted to his scrutiny.

Horace J. was a tyrant in small, in his world, and men rather feared him. The keen eyes in the withered face were fixed upon him relentlessly. Caspar noted the rounded shoulders, the hawk-like nose, and perceived that here was the restless spirit that dominated the vast machinery of men and motive power, included in the Lockwood Lumber Company, East and West, in and across the ocean, denuding mountains of their forests, reducing all to lengths, freighting away and shipping to other nations, with order, zeal and relentlessness, all of which was understood wherever his name was mentioned. Forests were grown for him to buy and sell

again. He needed men to do his bidding and they were born for him to employ and use, and dismiss again, when he no longer needed them.

By contrast, how fine and splendid seemed Mr. Everton, who had not yet become a mere driver of the vast machine, but still had emotions and impulses. Had he not, Caspar felt he would not now be standing in the presence of this keen-eyed remnant of a man, thus awaiting his pleasure.

It was a chance, an opportunity for him, should Mr. Everton's scheme come to a realization, and if it did not, he was no worse off than before. He met the gaze of Lockwood unflinchingly.

"Now, what do you know about electricity?" asked the old man, querulously.

Caspar laughed. "About as much as the next fellow," he said, good-naturedly. He could see that old Horace J. was disconcerted.

Everton explained how he had obtained a place where Caspar could study up everything practically, and fit himself to undertake the introducing of electricity into their works, in case he proved perfectly competent.

"It's a big risk," said the old man, fretfully. "There are men, now out of a job, who know more than he can learn in a lifetime, and what's the use wasting time? Time is money, Stanley — I've told you that a thousand times, if I've told you once."

Everton tried to smooth him down, but he was not disposed to listen.

"Haven't time, haven't time!" he exclaimed petulantly. "Take him away! You can do what you like

on your own responsibility, Stanley! You might give him a two week's trial, and if he succeeds he can stay, and if he fails he can go back where he came from." He waved his fleshless fingers imperiously, as of one who was accustomed to be obeyed.

This dismissal sent the heart's blood through Caspar's veins with sudden tumult. In spite of Everton's waving to him to keep silent, Caspar faced old Horace J. and said deliberately. "But I won't fail, and I won't go back."

In that second he resolved to make his own way by himself, and that he would stay in the city if it cost him every drop of blood he had in his body. The old man's contempt had not cowed him, on the contrary, it had brought the fire-like spark-upon-spark when the hammer hits the anvil.

As they stepped out of the office, Caspar said, "I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Everton, for all you have done, but I will not trouble you further, for I can take care of myself —"

"Don't be in a hurry, Caspar," said Everton, very gently, "nothing is decided yet."

There was a sense of real power in the way he spoke. But Caspar had recognized in the old man the same insufferable dominance that had actuated the younger Lockwood, as if it had been evolved in a sort of imitation of his uncle. The exercise of such a spirit as that required men to become trucklers and parasites. Caspar was adapted to giving faithful service, and a meed of gratitude to the man who hired him, but not to yield

up his manhood for the mess of pottage. He resented the very idea.

What? Had he come to the city to sell his freedom of spirit in order to get a chance to give his service? His blood boiled within him. He began to feel creepings of suspicion of every one—even of Mr. Everton. He was sure there were others in the city to whom he could sell his service without throwing in his immortal soul to make good weight.

They came out of the front-door together, and there stood a fair-haired man. It was Howard. Caspar was not very enthusiastic in his greeting. But Howard was full of excitement about a flurry in the Stock Exchange and paid little attention to Caspar. Then old Lockwood came out, and he had to give him the news also.

Caspar was astonished to see the change that came over Horace J.'s countenance at the announcement made by Howard. He was eager, smiling and exultant. He rubbed those fleshless fingers together in uncanny glee over the fact that his side of the game was the winning side. Howard suggested that they all go over to the Stock Exchange together.

Caspar made an excuse but Howard insisted so warmly on his going with them that he allowed his curiosity to overcome his desire to get away from them all.

Thus the four men arrived together, but in the crush soon became separated. Caspar was mightily amused with the sight of the brokers in the midst of their fierce battle and conflict, which seemed to him more like bedlam let loose, than the Stock Exchange as he had imagined it.

Then he felt a sort of pleasure in seeing John Quincy not far from him, standing with a shorter man with dark mustache and gray hair, evidently John's father. John put his hands to his mouth and called across the heads to him, something he could not make out, about his hat. Caspar gave it up. Then he became absorbed again in watching the countenances before him,

"Drawn faces like the faces of the dead,
Grown suddenly old upon the brink of Earth."

A spell came upon him of wonder as to how these men could so abandon themselves to this orgy of fearsome sound and excitement,

"And all for what? A handful of bright sand
To buy a shroud with and a length of earth."

Suddenly Caspar felt himself being struck over the head by an unknown enemy. Self-preservation being the first law of life, his arm flew out like a sledge-hammer to strike his foe to the earth. But he found himself beset by more than one foe, grappling with him, so that he put forth all his young strength in self-defense. Hands and heads were bobbing all about him in a mad delirium, snatching and whirling, and all the wrath in his soul against everybody in this abominable city broke forth unrestrained. He pummelled one, and smashed another, in the center of a wild mob trying to tear him to pieces. He gloried in the rage which filled his soul and gave him added strength to cope with these brutal ruffians who seemed determined to tear him limb from limb.

He felt his coat ripped from his back and avenged the insult by the striking out anew.

At last the crowd thinned, the assailants fell away, and he stood alone in the center, watchful still, and ready for the next one who should fall upon him. His coat was gone, a few wisps of straw lay at his feet, his trousers hung about his waist but one leg was ripped up the side, his shirt-sleeves fluttered in ribbons. Still he stood there panting and wary, waiting for another antagonist to appear.

Although one man lay on the floor, in evident pain, and another was wincing with his hand clapped to his jaw, and others wore rueful countenances, yet the majority of those faces which a few moments before were

“Like the faces of the wolves
That track the traveler fleeing through the night,”

now were spread in grins of enjoyment over the scene. Caspar could not understand it.

Presently several policemen thrust their way through the mob.

“I was attacked,” explained Caspar. “I don’t know why, nor by whom.”

And then the laughing increased instead of diminished.

“It was your hat,” insisted John Quincy, who pushed his way through, “it was your straw hat, I tried to get you to take it off.”

“My straw hat?” echoed Caspar, blankly.

“Nobody wears a straw hat in New York after the Fifteenth of September,” explained John. “My! but you did put up a pretty fight! Everybody is delighted.”

It was too much for Caspar’s comprehension. He simply stopped trying to understand anything. He was under arrest, disgraced, and minus his clothes, all be-

cause some one had a prejudice against straw hats after some arbitrary date, that no one knew anything about, and every one was delighted over it. He turned to go with the policeman, filled with the bitterest and deepest of resentment toward the city in general, and the fool men on Wall Street, in particular.

The ambulance-men were lifting the man who had been hurt and placing him on a stretcher. What would Diantha say?

There was nothing to do but to follow the policemen, as meekly as he might. A tumult filled his brain. He could not understand why everybody was smiling at him, and some held out their hands and said "Shake."

"Hold on, there," said a querulous voice, "I'm going on his bond! Hurry up, Stanley!"

The policemen turned a second, and all at once, there was a crowd of familiar faces near at hand, greeting Caspar with warmest enthusiasm.

"I'll go along," said Howard.

"Don't be worried, Caspar," said Everton, "you're all right."

"We'll see you through," said the voice of Horace J. "Never saw a better scrap in my life."

And some excitable individual caught the name, and cried, "Three cheers for Caspar!" And those now smiling brokers responded with a will, lifting him on their shoulders and carrying him in triumph to the Black Maria in waiting.

It was followed by a carriage containing three men who arrived as soon as the police-van did, and in a few

moments Caspar was surrounded by an enthusiastic body of admirers and made the center of inquiring reporters.

"Well, Caspar!" said Howard when he had secured him new clothes and he was a free man to go forth on bond, until called, "You've made me lose my bet."

"I don't understand," said Caspar.

"Of course not," said he of the almost flaxen hair, smiling pleasantly. "Stanley, here, bet me that you couldn't be made to squeal, and he has won. But I don't begrudge it, for that was the finest knock-out I ever saw. I wouldn't have missed it for a thousand dollars. Why, it beat football all out of sight."

"Are these intended to be compliments?" asked Caspar with a funny little smile beginning to play about his own lips.

"You bet it's compliments," exclaimed Howard. "Just wait till you see yourself featured in the evening-papers. Everybody's your friend."

In his heart, Caspar was doing a little calculating. If these New Yorkers had put up a little game on him, and he had performed to the satisfaction of all concerned, why, he felt he had no compunctions at letting them pay the damages. He knew he felt very much better, mentally, morally, and physically, as the result of working his resentment off on somebody, for the treatment he had been receiving, and if they paid for the fun he was satisfied.

Old Horace J. and Everton and the others kept assuring him of their friendship, seeming to delight in dis-canting on his length of arm, and physical measurements, as they would upon a prize ox in a competition, and he,

the despised fellow from the West, waved away, only a few hours before, was now a great success.

Three cigar-cases were being held toward him, but he only shook his head in reply. A hearty invitation to repair to a neighboring saloon and have a drink for the crowd, did not disturb his equilibrium.

"You can drink, if you like," he said, ingenuously, "but I haven't the habit."

They wanted to show him some hospitality and this was the most convenient method.

Disappointed at these points, old Lockwood indulged in a bit of extravagance. "By, thunder!" he exclaimed, "we'll go and have dinner."

As they sat in the splendid dining-room of the hotel, amid the wealth and beauty of the great city, trying their best to do honor to the guest of the evening, Caspar broke out into an irresistible laugh, that brought the rainbows out from within, dancing from his eyes and irradiating from his features.

They looked at him and smiled in answer while they waited for him to speak. He seemed to have given over his last suspicion of them. He believed in their protestations as genuine, and as coming from what answered in a New Yorker for a heart, at least.

As the questioning grew in the eyes of them all, he said, as if required to explain his inner thought, whether they understood or not, "Such a way to make friends!"

It was spoken so ingenuously, so unaffectedly, that they forgot the scrapper in the modesty of the man.

It also recalled to the mind of old Lockwood the conference of the morning.

“That’s all right, we’ll show you what friends can do, eh, Stanley?” he said turning to his partner.

Everton lifted his glass. “Here’s to Caspar! He is the best man, and he wins.”

But he looked at Howard and gave him a significant glance.

CHAPTER XXXII

“BLOOD IS THICKER THAN WATER”

DINNER was waiting at Pleiades Hall and the girls were declaring their hunger. Katy, the colored girl, was in the kitchen mourning over the delay.

“We are waiting for Vivian,” said Colleen, “she telephoned that something terrible had happened and that Howard would not be home to dinner, so she would come here, so as not to be alone.”

“Something terrible?” asked Seddie.

“Here she is,” cried Showery, and the black haired Vivian appeared.

As she pulled off her gloves, she said, “Don’t be worried, it is all right.”

As they looked at her without much intelligence of expression, she asked, “Didn’t you understand what I ’phoned you about, Mr. Rhodes?”

“Of course not!” said Colleen. “You said something terrible had happened and Howard would not be home to dinner.”

“What are you talking about, Vivian,” entreated Diantha, “what has happened?”

“It’s all right now,” she insisted, “for Howard told me that they had bailed him out and that they were all going to dine at the Waldorf-Astoria.”

Diantha began to feel creeps going up and down her spine. She sank to the couch nearest. "Don't be so sudden, Vivian, bailed who out, for mercy's sake?"

"Why, your Mr. Rhodes — Caspar — he nearly killed a man down town to-day, but I am sure he must have been aggravated into doing it."

"Nearly killed a man?" echoed Showery, very pale.

"I can quite believe it," said Seddie, "I think he really is dangerous."

"You ought to be ashamed, Seddie," reproved Colleen.

"And it's in the evening paper, and everybody is talking about it," added Vivian.

A black face appeared at the door. "My nice din-nah's all a-gittin' spoiled," wailed the cook.

"Poor Katy!" said Colleen, sympathetically, "Come in and sit down and let us have our dinner though the heavens fall."

Gene was opening the paper and looking for the item mentioned. "I heard something about a man having a fight down in Wall Street to-day, at the Stock Exchange, but I'm getting bored with those men and their boxing-matches and — why! here it is! What on earth do you suppose Caspar was doing down there!"

"What did I say?" exclaimed Seddie. "I'll bet it was that straw hat of his!"

"What nonsense!" said Diantha, impatiently.

"You're right, Seddie," confirmed Gene. "It's all here; how they banged it off his head, and how he began a slugging match."

"I can't understand; why didn't Howard or Mr. Everton tell him!" murmured Diantha, and she turned to Vivian.

Vivian became embarrassed. "It does seem strange," she said, "but you know New Yorkers enjoy a thing like that. Howard says that old Mr. Lockwood insisted on taking Caspar to dine at the Waldorf-Astoria, and that everybody is his friend."

"Ye gods!" exclaimed Gene, "I wish I could make a short cut like that to fame and fortune."

"I have always said that men were weird creatures," exclaimed Diantha, her grey eyes flashing with emotion, "and this proves it. You can't deny it, Vivian."

"No," replied Vivian soberly, "I agree with you perfectly."

Dinner was over and John Quincy arrived. He began at once to talk of the splendid scrimmage down in Wall Street, but Diantha tried to calm his transports.

"I thought I'd find him here," he said. "My father got so excited that he had a rush of blood to the head and I had to go home with him, but I knew Mr. Lockwood and the others were with him to see him through, and bail him out and get him some clothes."

"We should prefer to hear of something else," said Diantha, loftily.

"Yes, Mr. Quincy," added Colleen in a clear tone and smiling sweetly but with decisiveness, "—for a change."

There was nothing left but for him to seek the corner where little Anna was sitting busy with some crocheting. And presently he was holding a hank of

yarn on his hands for her to wind from, meanwhile assuring her in suppressed tones that it was the finest scrimmage he ever saw.

There was considerable flurry when the bell rang and Howard and Caspar were ushered in. Never was there a more subdued atmosphere pervading that sacred spot. Reproachful eyes met the entrance of the pair, but Howard's levity could not be suppressed by any of their devices. He insisted on giving his version of the afternoon generally, and the details of the fight particularly.

Diantha hoped that Caspar was not going to be flattered by all these tales of his prowess, when she observed that his face was marred on one side.

"You were hurt," she said.

"It doesn't amount to anything," he assured her.

Vivian's husband laughed. "You should have seen the others," he exclaimed. "But I don't believe that Caspar will ever wear a straw hat again in New York City, after the Fifteenth of September."

"Oh, the joke is on me, undoubtedly," said Caspar, grimly, "but not on me alone; for it has cost quite a neat little sum in addition to broken bones, torn hats and general wear and tear to prove that the population of New York is composed, down-town, of men who are mostly fools."

Howard was still laughing. "Well, I think they discovered that one of the population was composed of the walking-beam of a steam-engine."

"Why, of course, I thought I had fallen into a band of thieves," explained Caspar, "and I resolved to sell my life as dearly as possible. How could I imagine

that any one would have a grudge against the new straw hat I had just bought the day before so as to look like other folks. I have made up my mind after this to stay 'hayseed.'"

John left his corner with the yarn still wound on his hand, to say, "Father pretty nearly had a rush of blood to the head, and I had to go home with him, but he can't get over the way you swung out, Caspar, and the way you said, 'Take that, you loon! And that, you fiend,'" and he threw out his arm to show how it was done, "'and that you devil!' Oh, it was simply rich."

The girls looked on and wondered. Would they never get through talking about it?

"It was Kilkenny to the life," continued Howard. "Why, the clubs would have been only too delighted to have arranged a scrap like that and have paid a five dollars admission fee. I bet they will be trying to arrange a side with some big scrapper, and I'll bet my money on Caspar every time."

Diantha's head began to take its loftiest poise. Was there no way to change the subject?

They got around Showery and implored her to play "The Spring Song." But it was not a propitious moment. Then they clustered around Vivian, who began a funny little talk with John Quincy about "Dear old New York."

"And, are you a New Yorker?" he asked her.

"Why, yes, I suppose, we all of us who live here for five or six years call ourselves New Yorkers; for of course, nobody is born here," said she, sweepingly, with

a wave of her hand, "that is to say, nobody in particular!"

"Yes, and that's just like it is abroad," observed Showery, who was entitled from her own knowledge to speak. "Why, all the artists, musicians, authors, orators and great men of London go there from the whole world. And the same with New York."

"Of course we must except the children of the immigrants," continued Vivian with a grand air, "and they are only born here because their parents are not enterprising enough to go any farther after stepping off the gang-plank of the steerage-ship in which they arrived."

"And where were you born?" asked John, much interested in the young lady with raven locks and such fantastic ideas.

She gave a little laugh. "Oh, my ancestors never stopped traveling till they had pioneered it across the North American Continent to the old Pacific—and I was born in San Francisco. Where were you born?" she said, adroitly changing the subject to himself, most pleasantly.

Quincy gave a half-attempt at a smile. "I was born here, in New York City."

The girls burst into a ripple of laughter that filled the room. Vivian sat very much embarrassed. "Of course I didn't mean that every one born here was an immigrant's child," she said penitently, but the laughter only grew the worse the more she tried to explain.

"Of course you didn't," remarked Quincy good-na-

turedly. "I knew that, for my people came here in the cars, and they came from Boston."

"Of course they did," exclaimed Vivian. "Girls, I do wish you would stop laughing."

Then she had to laugh herself. "Never mind," she protested, "let those who take on the ways of the city call themselves New Yorkers, if they will, like Howard, here, who was born in Pennsylvania for instance," she said, pointedly, "but as for the rest of us, from Canada and the West, and the South, I shall say we are just plain North Americans."

But Howard was pretending not to hear and asking Caspar how much he could lift. Again stories of mighty prowess filled the air as John told that Caspar was the strongest man in Northern California, and that he had seen him lift twelve hundred pounds on the lifting-machine.

"Is there anything in the climate out there in the West that makes men generally stronger there than here?" asked Howard. "What state are you from?"

"Oh, I'm Pennsylvanian by birth," replied Caspar.

"Pennsylvanian," Howard echoed, blankly. And then after a pause he asked, "What county?"

"Chester," said Caspar.

"Well, I'll be —. From good old Chester? And here I've been taking you for one of those wild and woolly westerners! I wish I'd known that before."

Caspar looked him in the eyes oddly. "What difference would that have made?"

"Well," said Howard slowly, "I'm from Chester, it ought to make a difference."

He got up suddenly and went and looked out the window. Vivian went and stood by his side. "What!" she said, "and are you not altogether a hardened New Yorker?"

"No, not quite," he replied, "I am going to be Caspar's friend as long as I live. Blood is thicker than water, even with me."

CHAPTER XXXIII

“EVERYBODY’S FRIEND”

IT was a chequered existence they led up in the top flat of Pleiades Court the next few days. Misfortune was hovering above them and it took the form of Showery being bedeviled by the kind lady who was giving her a benefit concert, in her own contrary way, so that Showery did not know what she was about and feared she would break down in the middle of it. Also in Colleen’s finding herself ousted from her position by some well-to-do girl who would work for less than living wages just for the fun of the adventure.

“But why do they want to do it?” asked little Anna, who was new to the ways of the great city.

“God alone knows,” said Colleen, wearily.

But Diantha objected. “I take the liberty of saying that I don’t believe even God knows.”

She went down-town to her desk in a brown study, trying to see what could be done to relieve these stresses of their little group. It is said that the trout in a stream behold with indifference the agonies of their fellow-fish while being lured to destruction. Not so with this little bevy of New York women. Pleiades they were indeed, faithful sisters in a star-cluster, shining clear and bright for all to behold in adversity as well as in prosperity.

But what could Diantha do of herself? She had no

power to work her will and bring relief, much as her heart desired it. When old Horace J. Lockwood, passing by her desk, startled her by asking if she were setting the world to rights, as usual, she said meekly that she was not. In his own peculiar way he admired Miss March, and presently he was telling her what a good thing it had been for the firm that she had gone West. He could not speak of his nephew without profanity for which he apologized as a habit into which he had gotten while at sea.

But in a few minutes something strange came to pass. He was talking about Barry Lockwood's wife and children and saying they should never have a cent of his money. Diantha was constructed on the plan of justice. Besides she remembered it was by her appeal to this last spark of feeling in Barry Lockwood's breast that he had relented and had made her his apology. It was but a trifle, yet it loomed large at that moment and entered in to make a potential influence on her life as a subtle undercurrent of force.

She endeavored to dissuade him from his prejudice against the innocent wife and children of his nephew, and when Everton arrived the old man greeted him with a queer smile twisting his parchment face.

"Come here, Stanley," he exclaimed. "What do you think she's putting me up to? It is the blamedest thing you ever heard of. She wants me to get one of Barry's girls, damn him, for a granddaughter. How's that strike you, Stanley?" and a quaver came into his voice.

"I think it's great!" said Everton in reply, but he was

looking into Diantha's eyes with that benign expression she saw there so often now, "and it is just like her to suggest a thing like that!"

But the old man's heart had hardened again. He didn't want to be disturbed in any of his old-time ways and habits. His present pets sufficed and this entrance on the scene of a little human-creature would necessarily be a disturbing element. Diantha gave an appealing glance to Everton.

He bestirred himself in response to her silent appeal. He began to urge the idea insistently. "It would be a little bother at first, perhaps, but it would be the same as getting used to a new horse, or a new cat, but you'd have somebody to talk to that wouldn't be a servant, and that would be something worth while."

The old man said he would think it over, for age was hardening the walls of his heart literally, and it was not easy for him to take on a new idea so radical as this. As he turned away, Diantha murmured, "Poor man! How in the world have you been able to stay in partnership with him all these years?"

"That is a mystery," said Everton, gently. "Perhaps it is because I needed him and he needed me." As if he were too loyal to discuss his partner, he asked in a mock-merry tone, "By the way, how is Pleiades Court this morning?"

Diantha's face took on a shade of depression. "Do you want a pleasant answer? or do you want the truth?" she asked, half-defiantly.

"The truth, by all means!" was his prompt reply.

"Well, Pleiades Court, top floor, is a deep ultramarine and *lapis lazuli*, this morning."

"Explain," he said in almost commandatory tone.

"It would take too long, and besides it is in vain, as it involves the problems of the ages; laws of supply and demand and all the rest of it."

"As bad as that? and won't Single-Tax cure it?"

She gave his face a quick scrutiny to see if he were poking fun at her, but no, he was serious. So she told him of the stresses weighing on their little group and at once he said something should be done. She could have put her head upon his shoulder and wept her gratitude for the sympathy that was shining out of his eyes upon her. And also there was a dumb look of suffering behind it all that affected her poignantly.

"Why do not these burdens fall on the swarth and big?" Everton asked. "Somehow they especially select the frail and weak."

"Yes," she continued, "that is just it! Showery is just out of the hospital and ought not to have to get up a musicale, or if she attempt it, the effort ought not to be made annoying to her. Oh, Mrs. Blakiston is a nice lady, but she has no tact."

"Tact is a good word," observed Everton.

"And poor Colleen is pushed out because someone else will try to do her work, for enough to buy ribbons, and you know what that means for the girl who hath not? It's a choice between the river or Blackwell's Island," and then she paused, "or in the end, worse!"

"No danger," he said, brightly, "not with our girls, we'll pull them through all right!" and he hastened off

at once on some sort of a venture in their behalf, leaving her in a state of happy expectation.

He was as good as his word and when he returned he was glowing with an inner excitement that made his breath come fast. He had found a place for Colleen in a bank, with a salary of eighty a month. And he had two numbers on a program for Miss Showers for which she was to receive a hundred dollars.

Diantha looked at him fixedly. "Oh," she said at last, "I am afraid I am going to cry!"

"Laugh, you mean," he said jokingly. "And now, how are you and Caspar getting on? He is doing finely, has a perfect gift for electricity, no trouble about his making a success. Has the day been set?"

Diantha blushed. "No, no," she stammered, "we haven't had time for a talk yet about anything."

Everton went on to say that Caspar was a fine fellow and to gloat over the slugging he gave the fellow who had knocked off his straw hat. "Howard considers it the greatest bout he ever saw anywhere — professionals not excepted, and Lockwood says he will bet on him any time — because he gives the real thing."

Diantha's head was lifted very perceptibly; she was annoyed to hear of the affair any more. She did not relish having her sweetheart put in the category with prize-fighters. She dreaded hearing any more about it, lest the name of "Caspar, the Slugger," should become attached to him permanently.

To her great relief, Mr. Everton changed the subject abruptly.

There was a smile in his eye, as he said, "Would you

like to take the old man around to see Barry's wife and children?"

"What? Are they here in the city?" she exclaimed. He nodded.

"Oh," was all she could say, as it flashed over her that he must have hunted them up of his own accord, and without doubt, was assisting them to live.

"You are the one to do the noble things," she began impulsively. "Of course I'd like to take him to see them; I don't believe you have done yourself justice, ever—" and she broke off suddenly, as if she knew that was dangerous ground for her to venture upon.

He gave her again that half-sad, yearning look. "I wish they would select us two to set the problems of the universe straight," and then he half smiled. "I think we'd clear some of them out of the road!"

CHAPTER XXXIV

“WOMEN ARE WHAT MEN MAKE THEM”

MANY charming times were theirs the next few days and evenings. How young women who were breadwinners could so suppress their occupations and assume a negligent air of prosperity and ease, was an art all their own. Music, art, literature and common-sense dwelt with them like so many fairies giving them possession of things that mere money could not buy.

It was against the rules to “talk shop” in Pleiades Hall of Pleiades Court. The two half-starved students of medicine and dentistry were punished for their infringement of this rule of theirs. One of them used to ask the girls as a pleasant riddle, “Do you know how many bones there are in the human body?”

And for this he received as title, the significant soubriquet “Dr. Bones.” The other who drawled out the most threadbare jokes and had very sandy hair, was sat upon in council and declared to be as “slow as cold molasses” from which he became known ever after as “Poor Old Slow Molasses.”

Diantha tried to explain to Caspar that they never spoke of their housekeeping or their business or anything which concerned themselves when they had company. That it was very crude and ignoble to spread one’s inner

feelings out all over everything like a map of the world.

"We don't wear our hearts on our sleeves for daws to peck at," she explained to him, hoping he would be amenable to the hint and himself take the suggestion to heart. She wanted to gain time, until she herself was ready to tell him everything as yet concealed from him. She had taken Colleen into her confidence and had bade her keep watch over him in case of any leading questions that Caspar might ask about the furnishings of the flat, for he was as curious and inquisitive as a child over everything he saw.

"You will have to say everything belongs to you, Colleen," she said, "for that is what I have already told him, until I get just the right moment to explain it all to him. Of course it is noble of him not to want to marry a girl for her money, that is why I admire him so much, because he is free from anything like a mercenary spirit and that of itself is so refreshing in these days. But I am satisfied now, and I want him to give up that idea, but it is not easy to find him in just the right mood. So you will have to help me, Colleen, and do your best; for it would be a tragedy to lose him now," and Colleen understood.

In spite of all hints, however, Caspar would ask questions. He wanted to know many things. It came to pass finally that in an unguarded moment little Anna had said something about the pictures on the walls belonging to Diantha. And when he was led into telling the kind of a house he liked best composed of two big rooms with a great chimney in the center, Colleen inad-

vertently said that it would be lovely but Diantha would probably have to go to Staten Island for a location as land was cheaper there.

"What do you mean?" Caspar had asked abruptly. "Do you mean to say that Diantha could build such a house as I mention? For I could never marry a young lady who was better off than I am and be the recipient of her bounty. That would be impossible! That would be against *my principles!*"

On the spur of the moment to cover up her confusion, Colleen invented an aunt for Diantha, who lived in Boston, a very eccentric kind of an aunt who could be relied on to help Diantha to a little home if she wanted one. She signaled to Diantha, who came to them at once, and Colleen repeated her little fabrication and asked, "She is a kind of a funny old thing, isn't she, Diantha?"

Caspar seemed suspicious and wanted to know why he had never heard of this relative before, and Diantha responded that she knew nothing of his aunts. Colleen decided that the only way to proceed was to try to divert his mind from the subject as one would humor a child.

"Oh, it's hardly worth mentioning," she said. "But, Mr. Rhodes, if you object you might do like a man I heard of once. He was like you, and so he took his bride down to the canal and made her throw in all the money her father had given her. He said he wasn't going to have his wife throwing that twenty-five cents up to him all the rest of his life."

"Well," said Caspar dryly, "I am rather in favor of that canal idea. I should prefer it to being made the recipient of my wife's bounty. I can't imagine a man sinking so low as to be supported by his wife. It is against nature."

"Of course it is a little Quixotic these days to cast away a little legacy like that, especially as it would give such pleasure to the poor old lady to give things to her namesake — weren't you named for her, Diantha?" Colleen was pale and her voice very faint.

Diantha was flushed but she agreed that it was all so.

Vivian had arrived, and Howard, and at once Colleen begged her for a song.

Vivian stood by the piano with her back to it and asked what would they have.

"Oh," cried Colleen, "give us 'The Call of the Muezzin on the Housetop to the Faithful Down Below!' You haven't sung it for us in a long time. It has been chanting itself in my head all day."

Very simply, almost like a child, Vivian assented. In a red and white striped muslin with a coral necklace about her neck, and her masses of black hair heaped about her olive-clear face, she looked Oriental enough to be Egyptian herself. Her clear gray eyes were luminous with feeling as she intoned the weird chant in the original Arabic, and although not knowing the words, yet Caspar was thrilled by the intensity with which she gave the strange song.

Suddenly he found himself drawn away and almost startled at the wrapt expression of joy upon the face

of Vivian's husband. He seemed almost in a trance while it lasted and not till the last note had died away did he come to himself again.

"You can see how he admires his wife," said Diantha significantly, as if trying to not say too much. "Why, I shouldn't wonder if he loves her more than his automobile."

"Yes," said Caspar in a whisper, "he does love her, the way I love you, Diantha."

If that canal Colleen had spoken of, had been there before her at that moment, all of Diantha's treasures — pictures, books, bonds and bank-accounts, would have been swallowed up in the dark flood forever.

It was the next afternoon that many excitements followed fast upon each other's heels to keep them all in a flurry and bustle. First came John Quincy, who announced he had ten tickets to the roof-garden and wanted to know who would go with him. His dark brown eyes were as melancholy as ever, but that was not because of any internal feeling, Diantha knew by this time, it was merely the mould that nature had cast them in.

As they were deciding to send word to Dr. Bones and poor old Slow Charlie, there came a telephone message from Mr. Everton inviting them all to a sail in old Lockwood's yacht for a Sunday outing. Diantha hesitated accepting on Gene's account as well as their own. She remembered that that was the way poor unfortunate Ray had started on her downward career.

She knew how Gene liked to do daring things, how she had her little tricks of letting the men-folks feed

her cherries one by one, and of putting posies into their buttonholes in a familiar way that caused the other girls to wince. Much as she wanted to give them all such a pleasure, especially Showery, who needed it, she felt they could not afford to run any risks of being misunderstood, by the guests on the yacht.

She called Gene to her and explained. "It all depends on you, my dear girl," she said meaningly. "We must have dignity and show that we hold ourselves high, that we are not willing to go without a careful chaperone, and I will accept if you will be that chaperone."

Gene held herself straighter and assumed a more stately air. "I understand, you want me to wear a gray wig, and dress old, act old, and keep watch over you all."

"Yes, that is just it," said Diantha decisively.

"Good!" exclaimed Gene, "maybe the chief will let me make a write-up of my experience for the Sunday Flyer." That she should make a success of her impersonation Diantha had suggested that Gene go with them to the roof-garden in her new part. And thus it had come to pass that the group of ten, under the apparent protection of a gray-haired lady in costume severely simple as if in second mourning, passed into the throng that evening at the roof-garden and found seats around one of the tables.

Never had Gene looked prettier nor more interesting, Diantha was thinking to herself when she felt the bold gaze of an elderly man sitting near them bent upon herself peculiarly. By his side was a silver-haired lady, most beautifully gowned in a thin white goods inset with lace like a baby-dress might be, it was so fine and deli-

cate. At her throat blazed a diamond cross. She recognized the man, it was "His Satanic Majesty," the father of John Quincy, and the lady was doubtless his "Aunt Ruth," but neither of them returned John's awkward bow, and Diantha realized that this discourtesy was being done "on purpose."

In defence of their little clan she decided at once what was to be done. She made John arise and take Miss Lenore to the other table and introduce her and invite his father and aunt to join them all at their table. All this was done so promptly, that only Caspar and Colleen had had a suspicion of the real facts of the case. But all were in a flutter as the two strangers were introduced, save Diantha, who was equal to all occasions.

Miss Lenore did her best. "It is said that a little pleasure now and then is relished by the best of men," she said, archly, and added, "and why not the women as well? That's why we came."

Col. Quincy was a gallant gentleman as well as being a hardened New Yorker. His brown eyes gleamed wickedly as he responded something about it being understood that the men embraced the women, of course; which brilliancy from his worn-out repertoire was received with silence.

John then introduced Miss March as the clever bookkeeper who had saved the money from being stolen out at Boulder Camp, and Caspar as the hero of Wall Street. In spite of his splendid military bearing and his handsome brown mustache in such contrast to his iron-gray hair, the gallant Colonel affected the girls unpleasantly. There was an expression upon his face as if he had

been through every emotion to the surfeiting point, and it had left a bad taste in his mouth. Nearly all of them instinctively drew away to speak to one of their own number, even the poor students loomed up at this moment in contrast, for though they were half-starved, yet were they very human, which this man was not. The one exception was Miss Lenore, who in her half-mourning was pleased to be noticed by so prominent and wealthy a man, even in spite of his reputation from which he had been called, "His Satanic Majesty."

But Colleen and Diantha devoted themselves to the daintily robed Miss Quincy, whom they found very delightful. Presently they were discussing Mr. Everton with her, and she told them that they were due on the yacht of Mr. Lockwood, on the following Sunday.

"Yes," said Diantha, "and we have been invited also."

"And accepted, I hope," said the Colonel gallantly.

"You are acquainted with Mr. Everton, of course," said Diantha. "Have you known him long?"

Col. Quincy pulled at his handsome dark mustache and told her in a flippant sort of way that they had been boon-companions for about ten years.

Diantha had been glad to escape and find herself on the way home. She hardly heard Colleen's proposition that they take a gallon of ice-cream home with them, she was so busy thinking. She only came to herself when they were all clustered about the hospitable board and being served by Colleen with the frozen confection.

John was sitting there beaming with delight. "Do you know," he was saying, "this is the first place that it ever seemed to me I wanted to call 'home.'"

No longer being able to contain her feelings Diantha burst out into a wild argument that made everyone pause with spoon in air and suspension of appetite.

"Isn't it terrible," she began, "to think of the power you men have in this world? How you can do anything and be anything and it is all right? How you could lift the world and make it almost a Paradise, but you prefer to drag it down and put it under your feet?"

"Don't look at me in that tone of voice," protested Dr. Bones piteously, "not guilty here!"

"Ditto," drawled Slow Charlie.

Caspar seemed annoyed. "Who is doing all this?" he asked calmly.

Diantha was thinking of that unfortunate girl cast out forever that once had been one of their group, and of the effrontery of that man by whom she had become a 'Lost Pleiad,' all safe and secure from any punishment.

"You and you!" she cried, "all four of you! You are men are you not? And what one man does all men do!"

"Hardly," said Caspar, who was angry at these words.

"Well, it is a fact that you do not want the world to be better and happier," exclaimed Diantha, "or you would do differently. You, all of you, prefer to keep women from having souls of their own! You want them to be slaves! It is the men themselves who like them to be dolls, to be puppets, to be amusing, and we do not like it at all, but we have to—to please you! But I want to tell you right here that all the wrongs and all the miseries are to be laid at your door because of this

thing, for such treatment turns some of us into devils and some into fools."

"Ah, now, Miss March," said John, penitently, "forgive me for whatever I've done, and tell me how not to do it again."

"Such nonsense!" said Caspar, disapprovingly.

"Oh, yes," she continued, "you can call it nonsense, if you like. But it is the great tragedy of this world; for you must know that women are what men make them!"

"On the contrary," protested Caspar, "it is the women who make the men what they are."

"Oh, no, no," said Diantha, shaking her head mournfully. "Never, never, never!" She was thinking how he had compelled herself and Colleen to lie to him in order to please him.

CHAPTER XXXV

JOHN QUINCY TRIES TO BECOME ELEMENTAL

WHILE Diantha and Caspar remained talking in the dining-room, the two students escaped and the girls sat talking in the front room about the coming yacht trip and what they should wear; John and Anna had established themselves in the window by the fire-escape.

Lifting her fawn-eyes to his suddenly, she broke into a new subject that startled him. She wanted to know what kind of a business he preferred.

He assured her his father was rich and he didn't need to do anything.

But she had different ideas from his, and hinted that he might lose every dollar he had in the world and added, "Then where would you be? I was brought up to respect labor and industry, and I can't admire a lazy man," she said with dignity.

"Do you think I am lazy?" inquired John, somewhat alarmed.

She tried to save his feelings by evading the answer directly. "Well, all our girls say that a man is no good unless he is elemental, and strong, and powerful."

"Like Caspar?" asked John, eagerly, as it occurred to him that he knew one way of his that had seemed to meet with the approval of the girls.

"Yes, in some ways," murmured Anna, "you know he carried Diantha across the river; a man has to have strong arms to be of any account."

John's mind was made up at once. He would show her that he could carry her all right, if only he had a river handy. "Come on, out here in the hall," said he determinedly, "and tell me what business you think you would like best."

The hour was getting close on to twelve. "Why don't those men go home," exclaimed Seddie. "What a nuisance they are!" At last Colleen went into the dining-room where still sat Diantha and Caspar holding forth.

"It's half-past twelve," she said, exaggerating a little—"where are Anna and John?"

Caspar apologized and hastened off promptly. "Where are those children?" exclaimed Diantha, fully awake to her responsibility.

The two went looking around, as if for a mouse that had hidden itself in a cranny, exchanging glances of surprise at the whole affair. Finally they turned into the back hall, near where the ice-chest stood. There seated on the coal-box, in the dark nook, were the two, as quiet as mice, indeed, and both had very big eyes from sitting in the gloom, and both seemed very depressed.

"Oh, you silly things!" cried Diantha, "you gave us such a fright! Do you know what time it is? It is nearly one," she said, also exaggerating, as was the habit of Pleiades Court under these circumstances.

"I suppose I'd better be going," said John wistfully.

"Well, I should think so!" exclaimed Diantha. "You

will get yourself disliked, young man, as much as was Slow Molasses Charlie, till he learned our rules. You had better hurry," she added for emphasis, "this is against the rules. And Anna! I'm surprised at you!"

But the girl made no reply. They came out into the front hall and there John stood as if turned to stone. There came audible groans from the front room from the three girls there, impatiently awaiting his departure.

"Turn him out, turn him out," cried Seddie in derision, "did you ever hear my parrot say that?" Gene said something else equally fitting to the occasion, and even gentle Showery fell in with the spirit of defiance against the lingerer in the hall, and she cried out that her parrot used to say, "Good-by to you and don't stay so long next time." Then having relieved their feelings they felt better and gave way to peals of elfish laughter.

"What is it, you poor things?" asked Diantha, finally, for John spoke not a word in resentment of all this sport at his expense. He only stood and gloomed.

Then Seddie, in spitefulness, no longer to be repressed, drew off her loosened shoe and flung it into the hall, where it struck against the rack, and knocked down John's hat to the floor. At this piece of legerdemain, another peal of laughter burst forth.

"Girls, I'm ashamed of you," said Diantha, trying to maintain the dignity of the occasion.

"They are so tired," said Colleen, in excuse.

"True enough. Well, close the door, and we will go into the kitchen where we shall disturb no one. This matter needs looking into."

She led the way, and Anna and John followed her.

Neither of them looked very happy, and yet it was the misery of love that was their affliction.

"This is a very serious matter, I am afraid, John," Diantha began, "and I am sure that your father will be angry with us. You ought to be more considerate, you really ought. Your father will think we are trying to—" she hesitated and then fell back on language she thought would be calculated to strike the young man the most forcibly, "to rope you in, and that would be terrible. To say nothing of our feelings in the matter as guardians of Anna, who is too young to know what she is about."

"I don't think so," said he, disconsolately. "Anna says she won't marry me, because I can't earn my own living. She says my father might lose all he has on Wall Street in a day, and then where would I be? But I am willing to let her keep her own name, and stay Canadian, and go to the Henry George meetings and believe in Single Tax myself—I agree to everything. And I can lift her just as easy, all I need is the river to carry her across! The only thing that stands in the way is that she says I must earn my own living. You are so clever, Diantha!" He said pathetically, "Can't you tell me what I could do?"

Diantha felt sorry for him in a way, but it was not then the hour in which to begin the undertaking of so serious a problem as that.

"Oh, you are strong enough," she said significantly, "strong enough to lift a horse, if you want to; you could pitch hay for a living or you could be a baggage-smasher, the same as any other man, but I am afraid

you are too lazy. That's all that's the matter with you, John."

She suggested that he had better consult his father on the subject, and persuaded him to go into the front hall. As he stuck there helplessly, Diantha briskly took his arm and marched him to the door, picked up his hat from the floor, hung it on his head somehow, opened the door, gave him a gentle shove on his back, closed the door behind him and locked it promptly.

"I always said he was a baby," she declared to Anna, in her indignation, "and now I know he is a booby."

Almost weeping the girl denied that he was less a man than Caspar. And then Diantha expressed her surprise that a young thing like her, who had come down from Ontario to study domestic science, should have dared to go out there and sit on the coal-box with a young man in the dark.

"Well! who sat there first with a young man in the dark," returned Anna, brokenly, "who was it that found out what the coal-box was for?"

Diantha patted her on the shoulder and told her she was really very proud of her for being so wise and prudent, and bade her not cry any more.

In the front room amid the making up of couches, Gene Lenore was saying how odd it was that they were to meet the Quincys again so soon. As she shook out her dark tresses, she said she thought it might be a good idea to make up to Col. Quincy if no one else came along that was as wealthy.

"He wouldn't be so hard to take," she said, "just see

how finely Miss Quincy is decked out, easy time and jewels to wear and real lace."

"Oh, my!" exclaimed Seddie, scornfully, "any woman who married that man would have her cross to bear; he looks bored with everything."

"Well, I shouldn't care," said Gene, with a shrug, "so long as it took the form of a cross of diamonds like Miss Quincy's."

Coming into the room in her white gown, Diantha caught the gist of the conversation. She stood like an offended goddess. "That man!" she exclaimed, "I simply hate that man!"

The girls demanded to know why, and she declared him to be everything that was detestable in human form. "Why," she announced sweepingly, "he has a bad influence on his friends, I just know it; and as for his being a parent, look at poor John how he has ruined him. Why, he is no more fit to be a father — than if he were a crocodile."

The girls laughed, but Gene pretended not to hear. She settled herself on her couch and referred to the talk of the afternoon when they all were indulging in the "blues" over the troubles threatening, before Diantha appeared and swept them all away. "What was that you were saying, to-day, Colleen, about us all coming here to New York, one for fame, one for art, another for adventure, and all for fortune; and how after all, marriage was the best thing for any of us."

Colleen slightly blushed. "I didn't quite say it that way, Gene," she demurred.

"Well," returned Gene, "we decided that of all the girls we knew here, that Marchie was the greatest success. And that that was because she had such a good instinct for business, because she was economical, and because she had such perfect health. And then on top of all that, you said, 'And even Diantha is going to be married!'"

"Yes," drawled Seddie, wearily, drawing the sheet up to her chin, "when is it going to be, Marchie? and what sort of presents do you expect?"

"I don't know," she murmured as one in a half-dream.

"Well, if you and Caspar are going to 'hit it off,' Marchie," said Seddie, disconsolately, "I hope you won't go on keeping people up at night the way you do now." And she turned over and pretended to be asleep.

Diantha vanished.

"Heaven save us from any more of the pests," cried Seddie in scorn.

"To think of that old coal-box becoming the shrine of love," murmured Colleen, "I wonder who will be the next one?"

"By the way," asked Gene, who was still alert in spite of the hour, "what is that verse of Mrs. Browning's that tells how the girl is waiting for her lover to appear on a roan steed, and all the things she will do when he arrives? Do you remember what it is she is going to show him?"

"And to him I will discover
The swan's nest in the reeds."

quoted Seddie, sleepily.

"Well," responded Gene, "if Mrs. Browning had lived in our flat here in New York, she would have said instead,

"'The coal-box in the hall.'"

At this sally of Gene's a joyous peal of laughter broke forth irresistibly. But to little Anna, the theme was a tragic one; for so she had found it, a place of parting with her sweetheart whom she might never see again. She had been sensible and wise, but she was very unhappy. She could feel that her heart was breaking, and her pillow was wet with tears while they laughed so elfishly.

"What a happy end to a dismal day," softly spoke Showery from her alcove. "How much we have to be thankful for, girls."

"Yes, indeed," said Colleen, "Mr. Everton has given us a happy day in our checkered existence," and she put out the light.

CHAPTER XXXVI

DIANTHA TAKES CASPAR TO CONEY ISLAND

AS they sat on the excursion-boat bound for that haven of delight known as Coney Island, Caspar explained to Diantha how grateful he felt to Everton for his faith in him. "It was considerable of a risk for him to undertake to fetch a fellow like me all the way from Boulder here. For how did he know whether I would 'make good,' as your friend Howard says or not?"

Diantha seemed a little uncomfortable. "He is used to taking risks," she murmured.

"I should think so," he said, laughingly, "or he wouldn't have bet on me as he did."

"Bet on you?" she repeated vaguely alarmed.

"Oh, yes, all that business of your friend Howard's, trying to put me through the 'sprouts,' as it were, was part of the bet, he told me he was trying to make me 'squeal,' and after that performance over my straw hat he confessed that he had lost and that Mr. Everton had won."

She sat looking at him in bewilderment. Was it possible that that was the way Everton had proceeded in pursuance of his bet with her? Was that what he had done to discover whether Caspar were all she believed him? "He must be a real man, not a softy. Innocent

and unsullied by the world, free from vices, yes, but a man with fists."

Caspar was looking at the beautiful craft plying about on the bay, but she saw nothing. "Yes, it was a great risk," said Caspar, returning to Diantha. "That is Mr. Everton's business," she said alertly. "That is his life, his pleasure, his food and drink; his passion is risk and hazard —"

"How do you know?" Caspar seemed startled by her vehemence.

The sunlight was bringing out all the copper tints in her hair, and in her eyes was a suppressed resentment. "How do I know?" she repeated, "Is he not a successful New Yorker? Why else should he have bet on your endurance that way? I think it is outrageous!"

"Well," said Caspar, slowly, "going to a new city is pretty much like going to a new school, you have got to prove yourself!"

"I can't make you out, Caspar," said she, with indignation, "Do you think it was nice of Mr. Everton to risk his money on you in trying to make you 'squeal,' as you men call it?"

When Caspar was loyal to any one, he was loyal all through without reservation, faithful to the death. He could not tolerate that Diantha should cast any slur upon the brave gentleman who had become his friend, who had given him the opportunity of his life. He gave her a glance of disapproval and told her she was the last one in the world who ought to find fault with his taking a risk. "If he hadn't been the kind of a man he is," he

demanded of her, "should we be sitting here, together, on this boat, to-day? Just remember that!"

A sudden throb of fright overcame her. "What do you mean?" she asked, faintly.

"Why, what should I mean but the day on the mountain," replied Caspar. "If he hadn't been willing to take the risk where would you be now? Haven't I got him to thank for that even if there wasn't any thing else?"

More and more puzzled every moment, Diantha simply sat and waited, hoping some chance word from Caspar would clear up the mystery, without her revealing her ignorance of some apparently important thing which she was supposed to know all about. She harked back to that day, what had happened that was at all risky? Something came to her vaguely from an almost forgotten corner of memory.

"Oh, you mean when I ran down hill toward that jumping-off place," she suggested.

"Yes, and when Mr. Everton pitched that rock so it would get there first, I tell you I couldn't have done it; I couldn't have taken the chance that it wouldn't have rolled near you instead!" Caspar seemed roused to his deepest admiration at the memory of the deed.

She sat there dazed, and filled with wonder at her own stupidity in not having guessed this at the time.

"It was the most foolish thing I ever saw," continued Caspar, "the way you dashed down to destruction, and wouldn't pay attention when he called to you to come back; it simply makes me angry every time I think of it."

"Suppose you don't scold me for it, now," said Diantha, with a faint smile, "I'd rather think of something else."

The wind was blowing Caspar's unruly locks about, and the freshness of the breeze restored him to good humor. "All right," said he, "but don't you be trying to pick flaws in Mr. Everton. I don't mind his betting on me at all, and I consider him a brave gentleman."

Then the beautiful scene before him occupied his mind absolutely, so that he was unaware of the thousand emotions running riot in Diantha's heart and mind and soul. She gave over finding fault as to his treatment of Caspar, under the circumstances, but in answer to some strange undercurrent of her inner sub-consciousness, she said to herself, "But Caspar with all his faults is innocent, and Stanley with all his perfections, is not."

There seemed a finality in the thought which brought peace to her.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THEY MEET A COMPANION TO DOLPHINS

WHEN they had reached the other shore Diantha resolutely put from her all thought of that new obligation she owed to Mr. Everton, which had thus so accidentally been revealed to her. Why should she be pursued by any more distracting thoughts of Mr. Everton, when it was Caspar she was going to marry; when her role at present was beset with difficulties enough trying to please him by concealing the truth from him until the propitious moment should arrive when it would be safe to break it to him gently?

It would require all the cleverness possible to manage the matter adroitly. She was reminded of a quotation from a Japanese play she had seen,—“It is better to lie a little than to suffer much.” But to tell a lie so stupidly that one is found out before the matter can be set right, would be suffering unspeakable, she thought to herself — a lie was such a contemptible thing, the refuge of a coward. She could afford no distractions whatever, until this difficulty had been smoothed away. Maybe she could broach it that very afternoon.

Under the spell of the freshening breeze, the lapping water at their feet, the joyous crowds like children at play, maybe he would be less severe and implacable, and

she could venture to tell him the truth, confess that she had deceived him, and win his forgiveness.

They were threading their way through the mazes of a little world very noisy and very peculiar in its features. From the near distance behind the flaps of a tent, came the fascinating tattoo of an Oriental drum with a weird piping accompaniment.

Fortune-tellers of not beautiful aspect, but rather tawdry and hard of countenance, entreated them to hear what the future held in store. A dried mummy of the Toltecs sat outside one tent, a brown lock of her hair waving in the wind, and she, herself, swaying mournfully as if saying to them, "Like you, I, too, was once young and beloved."

Outside the gay pavilions stood the dancers in daring negligee and bold relief to show what manner of being held forth within.

Diantha noticed a look of annoyance on Caspar's face and hurried him on to the seashore, where hundreds of men, women and children disported themselves in noisy glee.

They watched them for a few moments and then Caspar entreated that they escape from all the riot.

"Can you swim, Caspar?" asked she. "I thought maybe you might like to get into the sea, just for the sensation of it."

"What? Would you go in there with all those rowdy people? And with me?" He seemed to be astounded at the proposition.

"Why, of course, I can swim as well as a man."

"But, out here in the face of everybody?" he still demanded.

"Much better in the face of everybody than alone," she replied with dignity.

"Well of all—" and he stopped as if words failed him.

"But what is the matter, Caspar?" she asked, vaguely troubled. "Surely you know there is no harm in going in bathing at the seaside? Surely you have seen pictures in the papers, of the highest society women who bathe everyday in the sea with their men friends?"

His face grew set. "I have seen the pictures, of course, and in the midst of them the impossible poster-girls with curly-cues like snakes wound around them, and pictures of young ladies with their skirts twirling above their heads, but I took them all as jokes, as artist's pipe-dreams, as you call things, here, that never happen! I never thought nice girls did any of those things."

A high wave came rolling in just then from the far away caves of old Ocean, causing a great commotion to those on the shore. It made the bystanders draw back from its encroaching edge, and caused a flurry among the women and children who were enjoying the delights of wading. But above every other sound was that of a shrill scream that pierced the air, followed by a sudden burst of soulless laughter.

All eyes were centered on this spot where was a sort of hurly-burly in the water, where a wave had swept over a pair of swimmers taking them by surprise. The man had a long black mustache and was evidently a

foreigner. The woman was slender and golden-haired, with her locks hanging long and wet all about her face. Her bathing suit was of striped yellow and black, made very scant, revealing her neck and arms and legs shining white.

As the wave receded, she was seen hanging on to the arm of the man almost weakly. Then she regained her bravado, and seizing his hand and pulling him after her, she came running in to land, laughing and giving way to her abandon, as if the whole shore were hers, and the sea meant for her playground.

With wet locks flying, with bared feet dancing and body weaving gleefully as if her spirits were too high to be contained, she seemed to Caspar the very being to be modeled as companion to dolphins drawing the triumphal car of Neptune. He gazed upon her with wonder and bewilderment.

She passed so near to him that the fling of her skirt bespattered him with the sea she brought with her. She saw he was a handsome fellow, with his gaze fixed on her, and she gave him in response — a laughing glance, and made up a little mouth at him as a saucy child might have done.

But the stern-set face that resulted, bent upon her in stern disapproval, caused the laughter in her to congeal in its source and anger to spring forth instead. She threw back the hair from her face the better to get a good look at this male paragon who dared to disapprove of her, and then she saw the girl standing by his side, sedate, neat and full of reserve power.

For a brief second the eyes of Ray and Diantha met.

It was all as sudden as a "zigzag flash," as Diantha afterwards expressed it to her girl friends.

There was a contraction of the features, dominated by a spirit of revenge. A demoniac grin appeared.

With a toss of the head, she cried familiarly, "Hello, Diantha! Got a beau, have you? Well, better late than never, I suppose!" Then her mood changed and her brow darkened, "You think you are going to be so happy, don't you?" she mocked and finished with a jibe.

Then she laughed, and went her dancing way, content with herself and her revenge, and her swarthy companion added his coarse tones to hers.

Silently the two thus addressed turned and walked away from the orgiastic crowd, over the sands, slowly, to where the black bobbing heads in the surf, and the people on the shore became less and less in number as on they went.

"There are a great many things I can't pretend to understand," said Caspar, at last, as he waited for her to speak.

Diantha's proud head was bent toward the sands, like a rose hanging heavily upon its stem. She could say nothing.

Caspar had a habit of asking questions, however, that went to the point, when his curiosity was aroused. "Who was that sea-woman?" he inquired. "And how does she come to know you?"

"She was a nice girl once," answered Diantha in low tones, hardly audible, "and that was when she came to stay with us in Pleiades Court! And then—"

"Yes, tell me how she became a sea-woman?" urged Caspar. "I — should like to know."

"Oh, I don't know exactly," said Diantha, brokenly, "she got to going with a gay crowd that drank, found out she was pretty, was persuaded to become a model for artists — We don't know her at all," she said insistently — "except as the 'Lost Pleiad.'"

"How terrible!" was his response, as if by that exclamation, he would dismiss the subject. But he had not finished with his questions on other matters which he pursued in an almost fatherly sort of way.

"And now, my dear, I want you to explain to me how it is that nice girls can go into the sea with their gentlemen friends and not be abashed." He was trying to understand, and yet relieve her of her embarrassment, because he saw how crushed she was under the blow she had just received from her encounter with what he called "the sea-woman."

"I don't know; just get used to it, I imagine!" she managed to say, with gaps between, but in her mortification the tears were rolling down her cheeks.

"I am not used to it, then," he said gently, "and I am quite sure it will take me some time to do so, for of course I am old-fashioned. But, tell me, did you have to get used to it, too?"

He seemed as curious as if he were studying a new kind of being.

"Oh, yes," she replied, trying to cover up her feelings and glad of almost any subject which would enable her to think of something else than those hateful words

that were still ringing in her memory. "I altogether forgot how shocked at it I was at first when I came or I should not have brought you here."

"And the roof-garden?" he continued, "I am only asking for information. In time I may grow to enjoy that sort of recreation, but at present, I do not see how it ever entered into the heart of man to conceive such a means of amusement. For nearly every number that was presented to us last night was as if an insult had been offered me. I will except the antics and jokes of the Irishman and the Dutchman as that was merely rough horseplay. But the vulgarities; tell me, dear, how do they affect you? Do you really enjoy them?"

He still was puzzled and trying to comprehend.

Lower bent the proud head, and the tears of mortification were still falling.

"Just — got — used — to it," she murmured.

Then there was a long silence again. On they walked through the sand. At last Caspar took pity and changed the subject.

"Last night I admit I was disconcerted to see how easy it was for you all to lend yourselves to a deception with one of your number masquerading with gray hair. I was unhappy over it at first, but I did not want to be a wet blanket, you know, and I tried to assure myself that, after all, no principle was involved. And then when I saw that John was ashamed to greet his folks in our company, I was greatly distressed. However, I saw you were equal to the difficulty. And when I saw the noble use you made of your deception and how cleverly you met the difficulty, and won them over, so that

they not only knew we were all right, but actually came and sat with us and became friendly for the time being, I decided that you knew better than I do, how to get along in the city. Indeed, it was masterly, as fine in its way, from a woman's point of view, and woman's need of strategy, as any splendid action on the part of a general, and I was proud of you."

He was glancing at her now with his rainbow-smile of full radiance.

Diantha's proud head gradually was lifting like a rose on its stem, after a refreshing shower.

"Go on, Caspar," she said, brokenly.

She could not yet meet his eye, however. She felt abashed in his presence.

"There is no doubt," he continued, "that you are much cleverer than I am, and I have been thinking about that day on the mountain — do you remember?"

"Do I remember?" she laughed gleefully. "It was when we two stood on the apex of the world, just we two in all the world, and it lay at our feet and belonged to us. There were the glories of nature all ours to hold and keep forever."

She looked him bravely in the eyes, and they walked on thus, transported to that far-away realm and thus exalted by the enchantment of that memory.

"It was a wonderful day."

"Yes, and I promised myself never to be petty again, never to be irritated by things infinitely small, but to keep myself on a more exalted plane, and be gentle and patient and not to give way to my temper."

There was a rapt look on Caspar's face.

"O Diantha," he said, "did you feel like that? That was what I was thinking, too."

"I couldn't keep it up, though," she explained, "for when I found the safe was robbed it made me forget everything else."

"And when that beast spoke of you lightly, I couldn't keep it up either," said Caspar, contritely.

"Oh, you've got to have a little red earth in you to get through this miserable world," said she practically. "Some clever man observes that if we did not destroy them, that we should be devoured by the animals and insects."

Caspar's brow grew dark as he remembered that night of the safe-robbery.

"And among our fellow-men there is a breed similar in kind to reptiles and vermin," he added, "and if we did not protect ourselves from them we should be fools."

"If we could live forever up on our mountain top, Caspar," said she giving him a bright glance, "it would be delightful. But maybe it might become monotonous, who knows?"

"Not I," said he taking her hand and drawing it within his arm. "But I don't believe we should find any spot on earth monotonous."

They went along by the seashore still being attended by those heads of strong men-swimmers bobbing in the edge of the sea. The sand was becoming deeper, and there was an open space before them where the waters had cut into the land. In the distance, near this place, loomed a structure, with flags flying.

"Oh, that is Brighton," exclaimed Diantha, "why

we could return home that way, crossing over Brooklyn Bridge. Would you like that?"

He agreed it would be fine, and so they kept on.

At last the sea was clear of human-animals, and also the shore and they decided to rest a moment on the sand.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

THE CODE OF HONOR OF RIGHT-THINKING MEN

AS she sifted the dry sand through her hands, Diantha wondered vaguely whether she dared venture upon her confession to Caspar. He seemed not at all "icy, determined nor implacable" at this moment, but she knew she must feel her way first, approach it gradually with a chance to retreat at a second's warning.

Something came into her mind, suddenly, as a good beginning for breaking the ice.

"Do you know anything about John Quincy, Caspar?" she began. "You see you are coming into the family, so you must help us on these serious decisions. He has gotten into his handsome head that he wants to marry Anna Murray. Now from what you know of him, do you think he is nice?"

"He is rather lazy," suggested Caspar.

"Oh, we all know that! It isn't his fault, poor fellow, it's the way he was brought up. He wants to go to work because Anna told him his father might lose every dollar he has, on Wall Street, any day, and then where would he be?" and she laughed wickedly.

"Which one is Anna Murray?" asked Caspar, interested. "She must be a sensible girl."

"Oh, she's the youngest of us all, with fair hair and very dark blue eyes. She had on a blue chiffon hat,

last night," but Diantha had to find some other way to bring her to his man's mind. "Oh, yes, she sat next to you at the table."

"Oh, yes, I know, the one with the dimples in her cheeks," said he, showing some intelligence at last.

Diantha looked at him curiously. "Dimples?" she echoed. "I am sometimes led to suspect that you men are all alike, after all."

"I hope we are," said he, simply. "I don't know chiffon from bombazine, but I do know the structure of the human face."

"Bombazine!" she repeated, and a touch of suspicion came into her eyes. "Sometimes, I almost think —" but she broke off suddenly and returned to her original question. "What I want of you, Caspar, is for you to give me your man's opinion of John, as a man that a girl might marry. I repeat, is he nice?"

Caspar looked at her in some surprise. "Nice?" he repeated, "why, yes, or none of us would be associating with him."

Diantha looked out to the vast sea beyond. "Yes," she tried to say indifferently, "but, I mean morals."

Caspar seemed relieved. "Oh, as to that, John wouldn't do anything dishonorable, I am quite sure of that," he assured her. "If anything he is the one who would get the worst of it in any kind of business."

"Business," she echoed, somewhat taken by surprise. "I don't mean business, I mean morals."

"With men, business is morals," he answered, "a thief, a liar, a swindler, a briber, a betrayer of trust —"

"Yes," she interrupted, "that is what I mean more particularly."

"I would trust him," said Caspar, dropping the sand from his hands, and looking at her slightly puzzled. "I don't think he is very bright about business, and that he would be easily imposed on, but as for his betraying anybody, I believe him incapable of it. I don't see what put such an idea into your head."

Diantha gave him a close scrutiny.

"Caspar, are you hopelessly innocent, or are you just pretending? Sometimes I almost think I don't know you at all," she exclaimed. "You were born into the same world that I was—the same terrible facts of life must have confronted you that have confronted me. Anna is here alone in New York City. I have to be a mother to her, and I ask you in all sincerity, if John Quincy, in your opinion, is the kind of man that it would be safe for a girl to marry?"

She was almost vexed with him for making her speak so plainly.

"Why, yes, I think so."

"Would you be willing for your sister to marry him?" If it was his loyalty to John that made him so reticent, she felt sure this view of the matter would appeal to him.

Caspar hesitated. "If she liked him, but you see Mary is very exacting. I don't think she would marry anyone who touched liquor or tobacco or played cards, you see, she is very prim."

"That is exactly what I am trying to get at," said she, with dignity.

"Very few girls would be married in this world," he

said smiling, "if they all were as prim as that. You know you have to take men as you find them."

Diantha seemed unconvinced, or else she was mystified by this speech, she could not tell which it was. But she knew she did not agree with him, and rushed into an impulsive defense of her pet opinion on that subject.

"We bachelor-girls have ideas of our own about the men we intend to marry," she said promptly. "We think marriage a very serious thing and that men ought to keep themselves pure and noble if they expect to win us. And when I ask you about John being the right kind of a man, I want you to tell me if you think he is moral from the pure and noble point of view."

She knew then that she had said it, and she carried herself severely.

Caspar hesitated again. "I will be frank with you," he said, as if he feared venturing on the dangerous ground for her sake—not his own. "John is hardly twenty-one, more a boy than a man, and yet I believe him to be honorable that way, too. I know he has a perfect scorn and contempt for any man who betrays an innocent girl, the same as Mr. Everton has."

Diantha was struck dumb. This was information with a vengeance. She fairly reeled with the shock that this astounding revelation brought to her mind. Evidently the three men had discussed this vital matter, and this was the shibboleth of an honorable man.

Her mental process indulged in so many cerebrations to the second that she was bewildered by the vista which opened before her, this sudden glimpse into the working of a man's mind. She thought it over.

It was good as far as it went, doubtless. But why should not all men be moral like Caspar? Before she thought she had spoken.

"I am very much pleased, Caspar, that you have told me this. It is noble for men to have such ideas," she said, and then hesitated for just the right word, "but why should they not resist wronging — all women?"

Her eyes were downcast as she asked it. It sounded more blunt than she had meant it to be.

He roused himself up, and the wind blew his locks about wilfully. There was a darkened look about his brows.

"Don't you see any difference between an innocent girl and that creature we just met, coming up out of the water like a companion to dolphins?" he asked indignantly. He had gone straight to the point. She could understand plainly what he meant. "The one is worthy of man's protection because of her ignorance — if all men would protect all the innocent there would, in time, be no other kind. That is all I have to say."

But he had not finished, and presently he flashed out again. "The betrayer of the innocent is a reptile of humankind and ought to be driven from the society of decent people," he said with an air of finality, "as for the 'Lost Pleiads,'" he shrugged his shoulders as if words failed him. "If a man is honorable among men according to the code of all right-thinking men, I consider no woman ought to ask anything further."

Diantha was silenced for a long time. What a revelation it had been to her to hear of this new code of honor.

And to think that Mr. Everton and Caspar and John all believed in it alike. She felt something happening to her brain. A new cell was opening, almost bursting it seemed to her, with this new sensation of taking in this new point of view.

Out in the waves, not far from them, appeared two heads, strong swimmers trying their strength. They watched them for a time, capering about like sea-lions in and under the waves.

"How wonderful to think this is the great Atlantic," said Caspar, at last, "and that the other side of it laves the shores of England and France and Spain. Europe seems so near, doesn't it?"

So they talked and Caspar began to bury her hand in the sand. Then she made him lay his arm in a scooped-out hole and covered him to his elbow. It was childish sport, but the air was good and salty and they were happy in their health and freedom from care, so that just breathing of itself was a delight on that bright day.

Then the lunch was produced and set out, and soon despatched.

"I can see a ship," Caspar cried. "It is our ship and it is bringing us all we desire. What do you say the cargo is?"

Diantha remembered that promise she had made herself that she would confess to Caspar that she had deceived him, under the spell of the sunshine hoping that he would receive it less implacably than he had threatened. That it had to be done she knew. Would this be

the propitious moment she had prayed for? She resolved to lend to the effort all the arts of which she was or could be capable.

"It is bringing us something sweet," she said, glancing into his dark blue eyes and noting the firm curves of the proudly set lips, the white forehead, the browned cheeks in the sun, and the thick mop of clustering hair, already rebellious in its disorder, not yet used to the new parting. She ventured to push that tumbled lock back from his eyes almost surprised that he permitted her to do so.

"What is the cargo?" he repeated significantly. "Not sugar?" She shook her head. "Not honey? nor molasses?" she said.

Then they were silent again, she feeling her heart beating fast at the fearsome thought of daring his displeasure, and yet venturing, meditating deliberately how she could so enthrall him that he should cease being so icy and so implacable. So that he should be more human, more amenable to coaxing and persuasion.

"I know," he said, and he put his arm about her and drew her to him, much as a bear might have done.

She felt herself on a par with a woman of the dark ages to stoop to such an ignominy as utilizing his affection for her for purposes of her own. She loathed herself for it, but he required it of her, she thought, by his being so obdurate and inexorable.

"Wait," she said with her eyes cast down and her hand held between them, "I know it is a little unconventional to talk about, but the fact is," and then she looked him straight in the eyes, "you don't know how — to kiss. Your education has been neglected."

"What's the matter with my way?" he asked much amused.

"Well," she said, looking away out to sea again, "you see you are so tumultuous. The first time you bumped me on the nose, and scared the poor horse so he jumped, and the last time you nearly loosened my teeth. Now I don't like that sort."

"What kind do you like, dearest?" said he, with his face dangerously near and his dark-blue eyes brimming with love's efflorescence.

She was a little afraid, it was easier than she had thought to waken him. Yet she went on.

"I can imagine—a gentle little kiss—" she said, "something not fierce and scarlet, but small and silver and in clusters—much pleasanter, can't you? Of course this is a funny way for me to talk, but do you know what Mrs. Mackintosh said of us?"

"No, what was it?" And Caspar leaned over and kissed her gently thrice.

"It was a moment before the answer came, 'Oh, she said of us, 'Of all the twa's that e'er twaed ye are the quarest twa.'"

Diantha was formulating her confession vaguely and studying him closely.

"That was nice of her," observed Caspar. "When are we going to be married, sweetheart?"

"Oh, as soon as we get things settled," she replied, and there was an alertness in her manner that betokened sudden excitement in her brain.

"Settled?" he repeated. "Why everything is settled now—all we have to do is to arrange for the day."

"No," she sighed regretfully, as she saw he was still going to be obdurate, "there are still some things we have not yet talked about."

"Let's cut them, then," he said. "I simply hate all that nonsense and stuff about explaining who and what we are. Let us play we are Adam and Eve without any 'ifs' and 'buts' and 'ands'—just born into a new world which is all ours."

The radiance was clouded, the spell was broken. All her confidences hovering upon her lips sped back to their secret holds again.

"I only wish we could," she said, ready to cry with disappointment, "but Caspar," she said, pleadingly, "surely we are reasoning creatures, are we not?"

"Oh, to-day? No!" he exclaimed, impatiently. "Let us put it off for to-morrow if we must go through the ordeal. This is the sweetest day in my life, sweetheart, don't spoil it! Let us take to-morrow, and pull and haul, if we must."

"But we go yachting to-morrow!" said she, suddenly remembering the top flat in Pleiades Court and the bachelor-girls rushing around getting their immaculate shirt-waists ready for the morrow.

The cloud descended upon Caspar's brow at once. "Nothing could hire me—oxen cannot drag me."

Diantha tried to explain, but it was impossible to convince him that there was any obligation imposed upon him by the general promise made by Colleen to Mr. Everton.

As for anybody missing him, he laughed the idea to scorn.

"I wish we could stay here forever," he said. "I

hate crowds, I hate people, this barren stretch of sand and you are what I want forever."

What to do with the stubborn man, she did not know. In her own mind she felt sure that he was inconsiderate.

"Don't be selfish," she implored. "I can never explain to anyone's satisfaction why I stayed away after accepting an invitation like that. Besides I owe it to the girls, they need me, you know how much they need me."

He was cross. "Thanks to your cleverness, they've got that gray-haired chaperone to put them through the paces," said Caspar, determinedly. "What are they to you, anyway, that you should carry the responsibility of them all like this — interfering with our happiness?"

She sat and looked at him puzzled for a moment.

"Well, I wouldn't have believed it of you," she said, finally.

"Believed what?"

"Why, has it never occurred to you, that we, none of us, live in this world for ourselves alone?" she asked in evident perplexity. "I cannot forget that if it had not been for some good kind friends of mine at a time when I needed them, I might have made mistakes like other girls have done, innocently, of course, yet none the less irretrievably. And I have vowed that I will do as much for other girls as was done for me."

He was gouging out the sand with his heels, and made no answer. She gazed upon him wonderingly.

"Are you so lacking in interest in your species, Caspar; are you so above being benefited by others that you can afford to shirk doing something in return?"

"Oh, put it off for to-morrow," he entreated, "we are so happy alone here. I am so tired of these problems."

He still ground his heel in the sand impatiently.

She still scanned him in perplexity.

"Problems you may well say, Caspar; yes, indeed, problems of the universe," she said, recklessly rushing into the exploiting of her pet hobby. "Don't you feel any stirrings at all to help reforms along for the benefit of mankind?"

Caspar was becoming reckless, too. "No," he said positively. "All people want is to be let alone. It keeps me busy reforming myself all the time, and if every one would do the same, we should all be better off."

And finding a shell in the sand he hurled it out fiercely into the sea.

"Reforming — yourself —" she repeated vaguely alarmed.

"That's it," he said, dryly, lying down full length on the sand.

"Why, is there anything the matter with you, Caspar?" She seemed startled at the idea.

"Of course there is," said he, smiling up at her. "Am I not a man? And is any man perfect? Have I ever given you any reason to think I considered myself a flawless specimen of mankind? Because if I have I want to disabuse your mind just now and forever. But then neither are you perfect, nor is anybody, and it's a good thing they are not — they would be awful bores."

He clasped his hands behind his head and looked up

at the sky, much interested in a passing gull overhead.

Diantha was troubled. Her Caspar not perfect? She knew he was stubborn and cross at times when he did not like things, but the need for reforming himself was altogether another matter. What was there about him that he considered required correction? Was he not all she had thought him?—pure and innocent? Was he then like other men, and had she been imposing upon herself, deceived by his modest manner? She was overwhelmed. What had Mr. Everton said of Caspar? He had said he was a fine fellow, he had been most generous; she felt she loved Mr. Everton for that magnanimous spirit of his if there had never been anything else, to say nothing of his having saved her life.

Again she found herself comparing them. What if there was no difference between them, after all, on the one count on which she had always laid such great stress? She had built an ideal man a shrine in her heart, and she had dreamed she had found him. But what if she had been only dreaming?

She had learned to love Caspar, not for his rugged strength, nor for his masterful spirit alone, but primarily for his purity, manly purity of heart. That was the elemental virtue which placed a halo about his head, which exalted him above all other men. Without that halo he was as much a stranger to her as he had been without his beard. Without that halo with which she had endowed him in her reckoning of him, he could not stand superior to Mr. Everton.

But when she had gotten this far in her mental calculations her brain balked and she could go no further.

She felt an embarrassment creeping over her at the thought of how she had presumed upon the strength of her belief in Caspar's modest quality. She wondered how she had dared but a few moments before to push back that vagrant lock from his forehead.

Caspar became aware of her silence suddenly. He still lay at full length on the sand with his hands clasped behind his head. But he was looking into her eyes laughingly, and with that radiant smile that always captivated her so.

As she caught the glint that flashed up at her from his dark-blue eyes, her heart leaped in spite of her cold reasoning. There was a moment's temptation crept into her heart to put off everything that was sensible, and to yield all her mental calculation, and indulge in the sweetness of being here with her dear man as if there were no to-morrow. What if he were not absolutely flawless — didn't she love him in spite of herself? What if he were not perfect, was it not all the better for that moment when she should have to confess her deception to him? It was such an uncanny thought that it almost frightened her. She felt herself going back into the dark ages again of womanhood, winning her way with cunning.

All she had to say was that he had deceived her and she had deceived him and they could call it "quits." And her tiny little fault being so microscopic by comparison with his would give her the whip-hand henceforth. But her inner stubborn self said, "No, it is not better, I prefer to bear the burden of my deceit and to keep him still with his halo."

He took her hand in his and pressed it to his lips. His ardor and complete happiness filled the atmosphere all about her, so that for the moment Diantha forgot the forebodings of her heart.

Diantha, however, had the habit of following when gray-robed duty pointed. She remembered that when Caspar was bold he was daringly so. She was already a little alarmed by the half-doubts of him that had crept into her heart so insidiously.

If these were his arts, she would resist them. If he had a power to upset her judgment, she would call a halt. She loved him, she hated him. She grew angry at herself for thinking that she could venture to enthrall him and make him less icy and more amenable to coaxing in safety to herself. She had discovered that she was playing with fire, that she was simply a fool, just like all the other women who made mistakes, when it came to being blinded with love.

She arose hurriedly and shaking the sand from her skirt, gathered up her belongings.

"What's the matter?" he asked, yet he remained in his easy attitude, as if under the spell of some strange freedom from care and formality, never shown by him before.

She looked at him disapprovingly. "You are too tumultuous—I don't—like you—to-day—" she murmured faintly, half under her breath, and then she turned away resolutely, and began to walk along the shore, alone, toward Brighton.

Suddenly he came to himself at the sight of her back turned to him and herself receding from him without

a backward glance. He was up in a flash and walking after her with long steps.

Stumbling along in her agitation over the humps of sand, she made no response to his questions. When he ceased asking them, she said merely, "I hate Coney Island."

"Ah, no you don't," he exclaimed, "this is the happiest day we ever had."

"Not for me," she said quietly. "I don't — like — sea-men any better than you like — sea-women."

"Don't be cross —" he entreated, "just because I was so happy for once in my starved life, I was so glad to think you were mild and gentle."

She did not hear, she was so busy thinking.

CHAPTER XXXIX

OVER LONG BRIDGE AMID FAIRY LIGHTS

IT was a long walk to the bedecked pavilions of Brighton. They did not pause to enter them but kept along their way. They spoke of the sea and other things indifferently, and the sun had set and twilight was upon them before they reached the long board-walk that spanned the marshes and the lowlands, between there and Brooklyn.

The lights were all gleaming from shore to shore and the red and blue and yellow lanterns were reflected in the waters about them till it seemed they were walking over a bridge in fairyland.

Diantha was busy thinking, thinking, trying to find out where she stood.

Everything was confusion, however. It seemed as if a moral and mental earthquake had shaken her very being. She seemed to have discovered that there were two Dianthas, and that they were in conflict. One kept insisting on the goodness of Mr. Everton and the other on the over-powering spell of Caspar.

"What a wonderful sight," exclaimed Caspar, dwelling on the weird scene through which they were passing.

On and on they walked over that apparently endless

long bridge, as alone as if there were no peopled centers in that corner of the earth.

Shyly, Diantha thought of that other dark water, far away in the fresh new world of the West, over which Caspar had carried her in his arms. She wondered at her childish confidence in him at that time, at her fearless dependence upon him. Was he not all she had thought him? Would not her intuitions have warned her if he were not? And Mrs. Mackintosh believed in him, too, just as she had believed in her. How beautiful was that faith of hers! She would never forget that Mrs. Mackintosh had believed in her.

"I wish we could go on like this forever," said Caspar, finally.

Then it was that Diantha bridled her run-away thoughts and came to her senses once more. "It would be nice," she said, "but, unfortunately we are due tomorrow morning at nine on the yacht."

"I am not," said he lightly, but definitely.

"What will you do all day with yourself?" she asked curiously.

He turned and looked at her with that smile in his eyes which always captivated her senses. "Won't you let me have the key to your flat and let me stay there till you all come home?"

"What a queer notion!" and she had to laugh at what she called the "deep-dyed" simplicity of the idea.

They had almost reached the end of the long bridge, across the dark waters of the lowland. Caspar put his arm about her, gently this time, and bent over, but she very decidedly drew away and said, "I have made up

my mind, Caspar, not to — kiss you — again — until we — are married.”

“But that’s no reason why I should not kiss you,” he explained cunningly. “Why, what is the matter?”

It took some time before she could speak. After some questioning she revealed the fact of her not being sure that she knew him very well yet, which bothered him somewhat. After awhile, however, he understood that her faith in him had been upset, and that she did not know whether to believe in him or not.

As this state of her mind became known to him, and the awful truth dawned on him that their love was in jeopardy, he was greatly distressed. He protested, he demanded explanations, he became stern and terrible.

As they took the trolley car and went upon their way in swiftness, still he was in a tumult of feeling, Diantha did not know what to do with him.

In the face of this new misunderstanding, she forgot her previous problems, and the sweet air rushed by, as they were brought finally to the sight of the great bridge that spanned the river, uniting the two great cities with its thousand lights.

But Caspar, usually so alive to the new and splendid sights of the metropolis, was more occupied with the great cataclysm that had parted him from his love. He gave but a glance at the mighty work of man’s combined intelligence and handicraft that swung so lightly across the dark tide from shore to shore.

To him at that moment, had Brooklyn Bridge been threatened with destruction, it would have been of small moment compared with the destruction that threatened

his love. He would have said, in choosing the lesser ruin, "Let the bridge go," if thereby he could have saved his love.

He was overwhelmed with the disaster which had come upon him, he knew not how nor why. As he became depressed, anxious and despondent over this inexplicable state of affairs, gradually Diantha grew more comfortable, more contained and content.

He seemed more like the Caspar she knew and loved so well. That other Caspar she was afraid of, she did not know him in the least. But she did not want to leave him a prey to these terrible feelings for twenty-four hours, so with a proviso, she agreed to remain home from the yacht-trip and settle all these misunderstandings, new and old, once and forever.

"But you must promise," she demanded, "that you will behave just as if Colleen and all the other bachelor-girls are there."

"I hope I am a gentleman," he suggested with dignity, as they entered the final car to carry them up-town. The voice of the city was calling harshly, but it could not drown out the accents of love.

"There is only one thing I have to ask," he said gently. She was all attention.

"That you will not make it too easy for me to behave," he murmured, "that you will show you do still have faith in me."

He was again her own dear man, and she was full of gratitude.

She promised. They parted at the door of Pleiades Court and she went in alone.

CHAPTER XL

THE PLEIADES DISCUSS LOVE AND LUNATICS

THE bachelor-girls had been busy all day renovating their costumes, blacking their shoes, pressing out ribbons, and getting themselves in readiness for the morrow. At last, however, all was in order, dinner had been eaten, and they were disporting themselves in comfort upon the couches at rest, while Gene was holding forth on some new ideas from a book that had come her way.

"Most outrageous thing I ever saw between covers," she was saying as Diantha entered.

A shout went up at the appearance of their beloved sister. Colleen at once had her at the table with a saved portion of dinner with which to refresh her. Then they returned to the front room again.

"Why, I never heard such rot," Seddie was exclaiming.

"Life would not be worth living," murmured Showery, "if such ideas prevailed generally."

"How can you read any more of the stuff?" cried Anna.

Then these protestations had to be explained to Diantha.

"What do you think?" began Gene. "Here is an author, anonymous, who asserts that only a lunatic mar-

ries for love! Now, what do you say to that? Things are getting to a pretty pass when a man, for, of course, it is a man, will sit down in cold blood and write such heresy as that."

Instead of launching out into the oratory expected of her, Diantha seemed struck dumb.

"Why, what's the matter," cried Gene, "aren't you and Caspar going 'to hit it off,' that you look so serious?"

Still she made no answer, and they all joined in the war-cry to know what was the matter.

She came out of her brown study, slowly. "Now, don't be surprised, girls," she said, meditatively, "but I think I understand that."

"Understand what?" they demanded, for the original question had been forgotten in their wonder at her mood.

"Why, about lunatics being the only ones who marry for love. There must be something else besides that is sensible,—respect and admiration."

"That's included," protested Seddie.

"I'd rather be a lunatic," cried Anna, in defense of her youthful opinion.

"You wouldn't any such thing!" exclaimed Diantha. "You refuse to marry John Quincy because he is dependent on his father, and you can't admire that kind of a man. The fact is, girls, that we have understood that idea for a long time. Look how we have planned not to marry any man that we should be ashamed to introduce to our children as their father. We are, none of us, lunatics."

"Well, I like that!" said Gene, "if ever there was a lunatic on this sublunary sphere, past, present or future, it is you, yourself, Diantha March. You are so madly in love with your Caspar that you haven't any sense left in your poor noddle."

"Gene is just trying to tease," interposed Colleen.

A tiny cloud began to gather on Diantha's brow. "I wish you would explain yourself, Gene," she said, icily.

"Haven't time," responded the journalist-girl, going back to her volume. "It says here that animals mate for love, but that human-beings ought to have higher ideas."

"I think I am entitled to an answer," insisted Diantha. "In what way am I a lunatic in choosing Caspar as the man I am going to marry?"

"Why, you are choosing him not for any sane reason, Marchie," replied Gene, "but just because he pleases you. He has an over-mastering will, and you will have to go into eclipse when once he is your boss. You will have to check all your lovely impulses and not call your soul your own. All for what? Just because you are in love with him."

Diantha was not angry, she was only puzzled. She demanded that if Gene thought Caspar unworthy in any way to tell her what she based it on.

"To tell you the truth, Marchie," she replied impatiently, "I have never seen the handsome brute for more than a minute nor have I exchanged a word with him. I consider him a sealed book. It would seem that when a man is so unfrank and so unsociable that there is something to conceal."

"Oh," interrupted Colleen, "he is lovely — just as nice a man as was ever constructed."

Diantha gave her a grateful look while Gene laughed at the term.

"I know he is a kind of a bear," admitted Diantha, "but I don't mind that so long as he is good."

"Good?" exclaimed Gene. "How can any girl know whether a man is good or not? A man can have seven devils and a girl would never know."

At this there arose a shout of dismay. "Oh, that is terrible," said Showery, "whatever put that in your head, Gene?"

"Why, it's in the Bible," was the response.

"My goodness!" exclaimed the youthful Anna, horrified, "I don't believe it is safe to marry any man!"

Diantha took on an exalted look. "My father was a good man and didn't have any devils and I know there are other men in the world equally good. I'd be ashamed to be so lacking in faith."

Gene held her fingers up and began enumerating the many kinds of vices which belonged to the ordinary man, the smoking, the swearing, the lying, the jealous, the gambling, the woman, the drinking devils that might lodge in the heart of the male being.

"Now, which will you choose?" she asked.

"What nonsense!" exclaimed Diantha, "that's no test at all. My Caspar does not have any of those devils at all."

"All the worse for him," said Gene, "he must be a monster."

“Oh,” interposed Colleen, “he is really as nice a man as was ever —”

“Constructed?” laughed Gene supplying the word, “he must be a construction if he is so unlike the ordinary man.”

“Gene’s jealous,” suggested Seddie slyly.

“Girls,” said Colleen, abruptly, “we must go to bed, if we expect to go on the yacht to-morrow.”

It took a mighty effort on Diantha’s part to tell them she was not going with them. After a few blank looks, a silence succeeded that made the temperature fall many degrees.

“That’s what comes from being a lunatic,” observed Gene significantly.

CHAPTER XLI

A BATTLE ROYAL

WHEN Caspar appeared the next morning, Diantha produced a long strip of paper with a list of items upon it. "There is no time to spare," she said, "if we are going to get through with these matters before the girls get home. Now, I am going to ask you a very serious question, what did you mean that night when you carried me over the river and you said we should pretend to be engaged?"

"Ah, that was a lucky thought of mine!" he exclaimed smiling.

"Never mind that, Caspar," she interrupted, "what I am coming to is something quite different. I said, 'but you don't want to marry' and you said, 'Of course not! Besides,—' Now, what did you mean by that word?"

"Did I say 'besides?'" he asked innocently.

"Indeed you did and made me most unhappy because I don't know even now what you meant by it. And I must know. Was it 'besides I am too poor,' or 'I should choose another girl,' or was it 'besides I should not marry a Canadian?'"

"I don't remember," he said indifferently.

"Yes," said she, "that's just like a man, what almost drives a woman nearly mad, he doesn't even remember. Now, the first time I told you I was not afraid to walk

twelve miles for I was no city-girl but born and bred in Canada, I noticed that there was a blank look of disappointment came over your face. And I thought maybe you had that against me. Are you sure that it makes no difference to you about my nationality being different from yours?"

"Why, yes," he said, "I don't care. My mother wrote to me in great distress about it, but I wrote and told her you weren't Canadian enough to hurt."

At this naive confession of his, the loyal blood of Diantha boiled in her veins. She looked him in the eyes intently and said sharply, "But you are mistaken! I *am* Canadian enough to hurt."

It then dawned over Caspar that a mental volcano was yawning between them. He was slowly being enveloped in fire, smoke and lava, and he knew it.

"Not enough to hurt me," he said stupidly.

"You don't know me," she exclaimed. "I am a loyalist from the days of the Revolution. I shall never give up my country, not for any man that breathes. I love my native land. I adore it, there is no place on earth that will be home to me but Canada, and I shall never change, I shall always be the same."

Then she waited.

"You are an American," he began, huskily, as was his wont when greatly excited. "I am an American, we have the same nationality."

"I am a British subject," she said, proudly, "the daughter of Loyalists, who left Massachusetts at the close of the Revolution and settled in Canada, when it was a howling wilderness. Is all that to go for noth-

ing? Was I reared next door to the glaciers to be faithless to my land?"

Caspar tried to smile. "Now, Diantha, all this is absurd," he protested. "What did poor old King George do for you that you should be loyal to him? Besides, he has been dead for over a hundred years. Oh, sweetheart, you don't mean to let a dead king come between us two, surely, after we have learned to love each other so?"

She buried her face in her hands, and he was on his knees before her, protesting and entreating her not to allow this thing to be.

At last she drew her hands from her face and looked him squarely in the eyes. He returned her glance so innocently, so without anything of his usual embarrassment, that she was touched to the heart. As she gazed into those dark-blue eyes, she gave over any doubt of him, she knew he was all she had believed him, innocent and unsullied by the world.

However, she was resolute in having this other matter settled once for all, distressed as she was in thus having to force it upon Caspar. It had to be done. They must come to an understanding, if they were to hope for happiness and harmony in the years to come.

A comparison came to her mind. She would put it to him in order to make him comprehend her feelings in the matter.

"You know, Caspar, that you can only have one mother?" she said, gravely.

He agreed willingly.

"And only one country," she continued. "Now, just

suppose that I should ask you to give up your mother, to please me. That seems terrible to you. Yet you want me to give up my country to please you." She arose and went to the window and looked out.

The harsh voice of the city as it appeared to Caspar, came in through the space. He began to walk up and down excitedly.

After a while he came to a sudden pause. "You are Scotch and I am Scotch," he said, "we belong to the same race."

"There is Kelt in my veins as well," she said, proudly. "I had an Irish grandmother."

"So had I!" cried Caspar. "My Scotch ancestor stopped on his way over, in Ireland, and brought his bride from there. Why, that of itself is enough."

But Diantha was obdurate. She kept her face turned away. "This is a good country to come to," he suggested, "why not for adoption?"

"I will not give up my country for any other!"

"Be sensible, sweetheart," he pleaded with her, "why, when a woman of some other land marries a native of this country, by that very ceremony she becomes a naturalized citizen of the U. S. A. That is the law here. You can't help yourself when you are married to me."

She gave a little laugh of scorn. "And do you think all the laws in the world would change my heart? Indeed not! Nor can they make me into anything but what I am — a Canadian."

There was a wild look in Caspar's eyes. "What is it you want me to do?" he asked, huskily, again.

She turned to him sweetly. Was he going to yield?

"It isn't very much," she said, "I only want you to promise that you will be willing to let me remain loyal to my own country, and that you will sing my national songs with me."

"I don't see how I can bring myself to do it!" he exclaimed. "Let me go out and walk around, till I can think it over." He seized his hat and went forth like a rushing wind.

"It is terrible, simply terrible," said Diantha to herself. "Maybe as Gene says, we are not going 'to hit it off' after all."

But her heart cried out in spite of herself, she began to think her loyalty to old King George was going to cost her dear.

She tried to think, was there a compromise of any kind she could fall back upon? She sat there puzzling and an hour went by. She felt weak within, and wondered why she had stirred up the miserable question.

Then to her great relief, he rang, and she opened the door.

When he came in, his face was set in lines of suffering that gave a chiseled appearance to his features. She yearned over him and yet she knew she was not ready to yield.

He looked at her as if it were for the last time. "Is there any way — out?" he stammered.

"Yes, there is just one," she made reply, "but it is not right to ask it."

He waited for her answer, as if instinctively bracing himself for a shock, and his face was very sad.

"I will give up my country," she half-whispered,

under her breath, "if you — will give — up — your — mother!"

But she was frightened as she said it.

He wavered as if he had been struck to the heart.

"I cannot," he murmured, "it is impossible." And he went to the door, took his hat and staggered from sight.

She looked down from the window and saw him aimlessly wandering along the sidewalk till he passed from sight.

She felt guilty and wicked. She wanted to make reparation. What could she do? A new idea came into her mind and she went into the next flat and borrowed something from the kindly neighbor there. She went into the hall and took stock of the things in the ice-chest, and from there into the kitchen, and began to prepare things for dinner.

"I wonder if I shall ever see my Caspar again?" she kept thinking. And her heart grew heavy.

The afternoon began to grow dim. She had no appetite for the food she had prepared. "Oh, but I have been foolish," she was saying to herself, "what has ever King George done for me?" Then the ring of the bell set her heart to beating joyfully.

He came in, low-browed with the hair hanging almost in his eyes, dark in color, a strange fierce look upon his features, and a glitter in his dark-blue eyes. He had been gone five hours, wrestling alone with his elemental passions.

"I have been thinking — it over," he said hoarsely. "One may get along — without friends, without relatives — it can be done — but a man must have his woman.

He cannot live without her. If everything else fails, the pair must be complete."

This was capitulation with a vengeance. Her chief idea was to change the subject.

"Sit down, Caspar," she said, soothingly, "you must be half starved, dinner is almost ready," and then she hastened away.

He was still in a fierce condition of mind when he heard the sound of desultory hammering. It struck him peculiarly, as if a thought-message had reached him.

He arose and ventured into the hall, and from there looked into the dining-room whence issued the irregular sound.

There upon the table pulled close to the wall, was Diantha standing and tacking something against the wall.

He stood and watched her vaguely, as she stepped down and gazed upon her work, critically. She turned and saw him and a bright flush dyed her cheeks.

"Do you like it?" she asked.

Then he glanced up and saw that the "Stars and Stripes" of his native land were there before them. He stood without a word — and then the sigh of relief that welled up from his heavy heart came as a mighty sob. The tears were dashed from his eyes and he looked at her for one supreme moment. He knew then that because he had yielded that she, too, would yield, that neither would require of the other such a supreme sacrifice.

"Do you know how to set the table, Caspar?" she said, brightly, as if that ordeal were over, forever.

Awkwardly he tried to place the dishes in obedience to her suggestion. Then all at once he laughed softly, and she came close to his side and asked, "What is it?" And he pointed to the flag, and drew her attention to the fact that it was tacked to the wall, upside down.

"The blue standard should be up," he said.

Nothing loth, again she mounted the chair and replaced it, correctly.

Both were subdued and grateful to the other.

Then it was that Diantha remembered how she had promised not to be too severe, not to make it too easy for him to behave himself, but to show that she still had faith in him by venturing upon a little friendly familiarity, as in days gone by.

As she told him where to place the butter-dish, very gently she placed her hand upon his shoulder. But by some inexplicable piece of misfortune, just then she let the piece of crystal fall, and it smashed to bits on the floor, as if to punish her for her temerity.

"I didn't do it," he whispered, and then they both had a fit of laughter that was simply irresistible, as if they were scared children in danger of a whipping.

All their cares passed away in a flash. How happy they were in their joy after sorrow! Both had given in, both were victorious, and yet neither mother nor country had been given up. It had been only a trial of strength of will. Difficult it would be to say, precisely what had been achieved by either, but each was satisfied that it was a case of "peace with honor."

As they sat there enjoying their simple meal, Caspar was as joyful as if he were supping on ambrosia.

“What wonderful glassware!” he remarked. “Why, it is all frosted with gold. You girls are pretty grand in your tastes. I don’t know how you are going to stand it with me; for I can only give you common-ware to drink out of.”

Should she tell him now? Should she speak out this very minute and say, “Forgive me, Caspar, but I have deceived you because I loved you so — and I was afraid I should lose you? But all these pretty things are mine and I have money enough to make us both comfortable at the beginning of our lives if only you will not be so proud and haughty but let me give them to you along with myself.”

But Caspar hated a liar. And she had lied and lied to him. She couldn’t do it. She was slowly crumpling up in her hand the long list she had prepared of requirements to be made of Caspar in regard to the freedom she should insist upon after she was married to him. She had always meant to retain her father’s name and not take her husband’s, but what was the use of starting any more difficulties.

He was looking at her troubled. “What is it, Diantha?” he asked taking her hand gently in his own.

“Oh, just a feeling about you, Caspar, if only you were not so hard-hearted and stern and terrible! Suppose I should deceive you some time. I couldn’t ever come and tell you about it!”

“Deceive me?” he echoed. “Why, what are you talking about? Why should you deceive me?”

“No reason in the world,” she exclaimed, “only if —”

“Lord of Heavens, what an imagination,” said Caspar,

pathetically, "you actually seem to enjoy trying to make my hair stand on end."

"But what would you do?" she insisted.

"Do?" he looked at her fixedly, and then he laughed scornfully. "Why, I'd tear you out of my heart forever. If you deceived me once I could never believe you again, could I?"

"O Caspar," she cried, "I don't want to give you up!"

"Then why in Heaven's name are you talking about it? That's just like a woman trying to drive a man mad about some imaginary thing that never happened and never could happen."

"Yes, yes, we are very foolish indeed," she murmured, glad of her escape from her confession even by so slight a margin.

Caspar was trying to grasp some sort of reason for all this talk. "Is it because I am not very polite to the girls and prefer to talk to you all the time, that you have got this notion in your head that I am hard-hearted? Because I will try to improve in that if it will give you any pleasure."

She heard the key in the lock, they were even then returning.

"Yes, Caspar, do try to be as polite and nice to them as you can. I want them to like you. I am not the foolish, jealous kind that would keep you from being agreeable to another girl than myself. And I want them to like you even if they do say you are like a bear."

But she knew her love for Caspar was turning her into a coward.

CHAPTER XLII

A FLAMBOYANT ROSE OF LOVE

IT was easy for Caspar to talk with Colleen, for she always enjoyed hearing about the West. "But you wouldn't want to live there?" he asked her.

"Wouldn't I?" she smiled back at him.

Then he and Showery had a little conversation about the day on the yacht. Diantha and Colleen retired to the next room to discuss the ways and means of Pleiades Hall, which had to be done weekly. Seddie and Anna, the youthful, soon joined in and Caspar began to feel more at home with them and to indulge in some of those quaint quips of his which were always so amusing.

Miss Lenore sat off by the window seemingly not interested. Caspar was obeying instructions and trying to be attentive for Diantha's sake, but this one girl who remained out of the circle bothered him. Perhaps she was the very one who thought him a bear. He resolved to set himself straight with her if possible, nerved up by his desire to prove to Diantha that he was not hard-hearted.

He arose in a natural way and went to the window where she sat and seeing a queer sort of hanging balustrade of iron outside, demanded to know what it was called.

"Don't you know?" she replied pertly. "Why, it's a fire-escape."

"So it is," he returned quickly. "I thought it was an aviary for girls."

There was a general laugh went up at this bit of pleasantry.

Gene decided that he was rather nice. She found herself admiring the dark-blue of his eyes, the heavy eyebrows, and the unruly mop of hair. As for his features, they were not really perfect, but his smile made one forget that. Gene wanted to see if he were stuffed with sawdust or red blood.

She began talking about Diantha to him, and he was charmed, in his ingenuous way, concealing nothing.

In answer to something she said, Caspar spoke most confidently. "Of course I do, she is so clever, so beautiful and so good, don't you think so?"

Gene was taken by surprise at this almost shameless avowal of his admiration for the girl he was to marry. It was so unconventional. He should have been more civilized, more like the highly evolved Chinese, who cast aspersions upon themselves and their families in answer to such questions.

"Oh, I don't know," she returned, "Diantha is a splendid girl, and as good as gold, but it has never occurred to any of us, I am sure, that she was beautiful. She has lovely hair, and is always so scrubbed that she has the cleanest skin I ever saw, but as for being beautiful —"

Caspar saw that he must do better than that if he

hoped to make a good impression on Miss Lenore. He bent over with his most dazzling smile and said, "Of course you all are so clever and so beautiful and so good that you could hardly be expected to see these virtues in each other. It takes an outsider to see these things."

Gene was startled, as if a bomb had gone off at her feet, but she contained herself and only said, "Oh, you must have committed that compliment to memory to get it off so pat!"

"On the contrary," said he, still smiling, "I assure you it was entirely sporadic."

Gene waked up. Here was a foeman worthy of her steel and she began to scintillate for his benefit with all the witty things at her tongue's end.

"What do you mean by sporadic?" she asked comically, and went on to define what she thought was the derivation of the word.

"Oh, I don't know," he returned, cornered, "I think I must have meant 'spontaneous' only you scared me out of it." At this they all laughed heartily.

Under the influence of such a moment, one's brain-cells become superlatively aroused, with jibe following jibe, and jest following jest, till the stimulation of cerebration acts like mental champagne on the senses.

It became parry-and-thrust till the other girls became mute with astonishment. Presently before their very eyes, there was Gene pinning a rose in Caspar's button-hole as freely as if he had been her own cavalier.

Looking at his watch, suddenly, Caspar announced he must go and would they tell Diantha.

Gene went at once with the message, and added to it,

"I take back all I said, last night, Marchie. I think your Caspar is a pearl of great price and you are a lucky girl to have found him."

Diantha returned to the front room to say good night, much pleased at this amend of Gene's. But when she stood at the door and saw the strange ornament decking the lapel of her lover, she was filled with the most peculiar sensation. Who had dared to take such a liberty as this with her Caspar? Who had dared to poach on her domain?

She stepped out into the hall with him and closed the door behind them.

"Whose rose is that?" she demanded.

Caspar looked down at the flower and then at her. "I suppose it must be — mine," he said, awkwardly.

For reply Diantha snatched out the offending blossom, flung it on the floor and crushed it beneath her foot. Caspar looked at her in amazement.

"Who gave you that?" she asked.

"Why, it was the one with the dark eyebrows and the pointed chin — and the gray wig, I thought you would be so pleased," he said, lost in wonder at her unaccountable mood.

"Oh!" was all she could say, out of the tumult of what she felt.

Then she led the way to the roof and when they stood there in the pleasant air, under the stars, on the top of the great city, she felt herself grow calmer.

But Caspar was still in a daze over it all. "I thought you would be so pleased," he repeated.

"So I should if it had been Colleen," she explained,

"because Colleen has a true affection for you, but that Gene Lenore — O Caspar, you are not to think I am jealous, nothing is farther from my thoughts —"

"Well, it must be my fault, then, for that one was not in the circle, at all," said he, his sense of justice making him come to the defense of Miss Lenore, "and I wanted her to pay some attention to me, because I thought it would please you, and I made her."

"'You — made — her,'" Diantha echoed, scarcely believing the words.

"Yes," said he ingenuously, "all of them but that one were joining in as nice as could be, all but that one, and she sat off so disdainful-like that I just made up my mind that I would make her come in, and I did!"

He seemed proud of his achievement instead of being abashed.

It was Diantha's turn to be amazed. "'Come in, with a vengeance —'" she murmured. "Why, Caspar! I am afraid you are like other men after all!"

His head went back as if he had been struck. And he struck back at her in kind. "And I am afraid you are like other women," he responded, quickly, "utterly incomprehensible, utterly inconsistent and utterly incorrigible."

"I don't see why you say that," she gasped, "what have I done?"

He looked off at the great light-crowned roofs about them, the starry canopy above, and tugged at a lock of his hair as if he meant to pull it out by the roots. "I could be so happy —" he murmured — "what is the use of bedeviling a poor fellow so all the time?"

It was thus they parted. Caspar went on his way, perplexed out of his five senses, but Diantha with flaming eyes determined to punish Gene Lenore for daring to come between herself and her Caspar.

As she came down the stairs she was surprised to see Colleen there, kneeling down and gathering something up from the floor. She met her gaze as serenely as ever, but said it looked so untidy to have those crushed flowers lying all about the hall. And Diantha wondered if Colleen knew it was Gene's rose, which had been so flamboyant over Caspar's heart, that now was lying all crumpled up in the palm of her hand.

CHAPTER XLIII

DIANTHA MAKES GENE SUFFER

TOGETHER they entered the door, silently. Colleen seemed to know that she, Diantha, was laboring under a great excitement, and urged her to lie down on the couch and rest her back. That was Colleen's soothing way. Amidst the pillows Diantha placed herself as bidden and gazed upon the bevy of girls still discussing the book that maintained that "only lunatics married for love."

Diantha's sense of justice was great. She knew she would not have placed a rose of love upon the heart of Gene's betrothed, he would have been as sacred to her as a brother. Then why should Gene have been so flippant and familiar with the man she had chosen from all the world? It was not nice, and it was not pretty, and Gene should be made to feel how lacking she appeared to be in good taste.

Her elemental nature was stirred to its depths. Had she been an Oriental whose lover was to be snatched away by the wiles of a rival, her rage would have been expressed in tragedy. But she was from the line of latitude where the eternal snows give a power of endurance, and one of a race, to whom comes as a birthright, the gift of using

"That sarcasm that brings a winter to the heart."

When the girls asked her for her opinion on the burning subject of the book, she announced that more serious things were occupying her attention, and presently the volume slipped from Gene's grasp and fell to the floor forgotten, as Diantha went on to explain that sometimes people stood on the verge of a yawning chasm, right at their very feet, and laughed and chatted frivolously, as if they were apes, instead of being human beings with immortal souls.

"The most of people, especially thoughtless girls, are apes more or less," she said somberly, and then to accentuate her point, she quoted,

"Mindless they live, and mindless they love,
And mindless they die."

"Good gracious!" cried Showery, who was very nervous from her temperament, and could not bear much, "don't keep us in suspense! What is it?"

"Well, whatever we are, we are not like that," said Gene, resolutely.

"Girls," exclaimed Diantha, sitting up suddenly, and facing them with her eyes darkening from the restrained passion of resentment behind them, "did you know that a mysterious change has been coming over us, each and all, since we left our homes and came to dwell here in New York City? That we have become permeated with its customs and habits, until we are like pickles in brine or sardines in oil?"

In the midst of her alarm, Colleen took heart. She had heard something like this before, and it did not seem so very terrible after all. Doubtless it was only one of Diantha's pet hobbies she was exploiting.

"That's so we will keep," returned Gene, "we don't want to be too fresh, or we'll spoil."

Anna laughed in spite of herself, and Seddie shrugged her shoulders. If that was all that worried Diantha, it wasn't worth mentioning.

A little fire blazed in Diantha's eyes, and the red came rushing into her cheek. "Well, girls, I want to tell you that you don't realize you are standing on the verge of a yawning chasm, and that you don't know any more about it than if you were so many blind apes. Don't you feel a difference? Don't you know that something has happened to you? Can't you realize that you have lost something — your native innocence — your pristine glory — your halo of beauty?"

"What's bothering you?" demurred Gene, who was the only one who was not too dumbfounded to speak. "What are you trying to get at?"

Seddie picked up the fallen book, opened it and began making a sketch of a girl in a sunbonnet stepping along on her toes, and trying to reach a little circlet in the air, above her head, at which Anna smiled in spite of herself. Gene put her hand to her wig and pretended to pull her imaginary halo on straight.

"Well, I see I shall have to speak plainly," said Diantha, annoyed by this lack of seriousness. "You, all, with the exception of Anna, once knew the poor being whom we now refer to as, 'The Lost Pleiad.' Her ways are not our ways and her manners are not our manners. And yet can't you remember when first Ray came to make her home with us, what a sweet nice girl she was, before she became frivolous and went mad

taking on the ways and customs of the city? I haven't had time to tell you of my meeting with her yesterday. And I don't believe I ever can tell you all of it—she has fallen so low,” but in a few quick words she told what had happened and described the “companion to dolphins” coming up out of the sea, and the jibe she had flung at her as she passed on her flaunting way.

The girls became hushed.

“And going into galloping consumption, too,” murmured Showery, piteously.

“We feel horrified at her,” continued Diantha, “but if we only knew it we could be horrified at ourselves for the changes that have come over us. Admit it, Gene,” she said pointedly, “don't you do things now, you would have blushed to do when first you came?”

“Well, we have to adapt ourselves to our environment, if we hope to survive,” returned Gene, “and you know that's the problem here.”

“The same as everywhere,” said Seddie nonchalantly, making a comical cartoon of an ape alongside the girl, laughing at her.

“That's just it,” began Diantha, afresh, “but surely you must realize it is the sensible who survive, and the foolish who perish. Isn't that the law of life? Don't we want to be the wise virgins who survive? Of course we do. That's why I am trying to make the thing plain to you. We don't want to be apes nor mindless beings.”

“Of course not,” murmured Seddie.

Diantha went on. “Look at the thousands of poor ambitious girls who come to New York to accomplish

something in art, music, journalism, business of all kinds, who are the ones that are going to survive? Not the weakminded ones who are frivolous and giddy and easily lured by the glitter of the city! No, it is the one who sticks to business, every time."

"I am sure you have a right to speak," said Colleen gently.

"If it hadn't been for my illness," began Showery, her eyes wet with self-despair.

"How can you go on, harrowing us up this way," spoke Gene, with a cloud on her brow. "What object have you in it? I can't make you out to-night."

"If we all had perfect health as you have," said Seddie, "it would be different. But what can you expect of the rest of us? we've each had to take our turn in the hospital."

"Except Anna," corrected Colleen.

"Oh, she'll be there in time, if she stays here," said Seddie, nonchalantly.

Diantha arose and with outstretched arms of inquiry, asked, "But is that any excuse, being in the hospital or not, why we should forget to be ladies? Why we should descend to the lower levels of the common horde of human animals about us? Why we should allow ourselves to get slangy, and tough, and as hard as nails?"

"Who is all this, I'd like to know?" asked Gene, with an injured air.

"Why, all of us," returned Diantha with a sweep of her hand. "Are we the same as when we came, fresh from our homes and our mothers? Of course not. Don't we all go to the roof-garden without a qualm

or a shiver? Don't we stand double-entendres in the plays as if we were club men? How can we be the same? Yet even though we may be hardened in these ways, I do think we might preserve a few things!"

"Meaning what?" asked Miss Lenore, in a discontented tone.

Diantha knew she was trying to pierce Gene's armor of complacency, while flailing her over the shoulders of the others. But she could accomplish her purpose, which was to try to bring Gene to a comprehension of her lack of good taste, without revealing her inner resentment personally.

"Our ladylike manners — our sense of good taste — our English," she responded. "Conversation can be carried on nowadays by saying everything is 'fierce' or else by telling every one 'You go way back and sit down' or replying, 'That's right,' even when it is wrong."

"O Marchie," demurred Seddie, "that was last year."

"Where are the roses of yesterday," quoted Diantha — "what kind of speech is it that's out of date in a year?"

At last Gene did lose some of her self-complacency. "I know it is a bad habit to use bad English," she said, crestfallen, "and particularly for me — with my aspirations to be literary. I know it's wrong, and I ought to do better. But then, we all do it, even you, Marchie, you sling some of the queerest slang I ever heard."

"I? sling slang?" repeated Diantha. "Well, if I do, I hope you will call me to order! I know sometimes it is

almost impossible to get along without saying these things for *emphasis* — but I should like you to tell me what it is I say that sounds slang to you, for instance —”

“You came here to New York, Marchie, with homespun slang of your own,” insisted Gene. “When you were tired you said you were ‘donsie,’ and when we used to be too full of high spirits you used to tell us not to be so ‘glee-geenish,’ and a few more like those.”

At the sound of those familiar home-words, Diantha almost relented. “I learned those from my dear old grandmother,” she said gently. “They are Scotch and Irish words, very ancient and not born yesterday. But I am glad you spoke of this, for I want to keep guard on my speech just as much as if I had the literary aspirations you have, Gene.”

“I admit that you are right on a great many things,” responded Gene, “and this is a very important matter to me, for I do want to make a success of my writing.” Then a worried look crept over her face. “But what in the world ever started you on such a tirade, Marchie?” she continued. “Haven’t we got troubles enough of our own at the present time, that you should get us all worked up so over the preservation of our English?”

For Gene with all her attempts to assume a stolid exterior was abnormally sensitive to criticism, and instinctively felt the full force of those fierce currents of disapproval emanating from Diantha’s self.

“English?” repeated Seddie. “It was manners and morals, at first!”

"Yes," joined in Showery, timidly, "you said we were forgetting to be ladies."

"And something about our being as 'hard as nails,'" suggested Colleen.

"And something about our getting as horrified at ourselves as we do at—the—'Lost Pleiad,'" murmured Anna, faintly.

Diantha was sorry she had said so much. She tried to hedge as usual, by changing the subject, but the chorus demanded to know where she had gotten such ideas. They accused and shamed her for her unkindness, till at last she was forced to defend herself. "It was someone else who suggested it," she admitted reluctantly.

"Not Caspar?" asked Colleen, intuitively.

"Well, we girls may as well face the truth," she said, meditatively. "He comes here to the city with a virginal mind. He sees things as we did when we first came. He is horrified at the sight of the men and women going in bathing together in all their freedom, at the coarse songs at the roof-garden, at our being so hardened to all these things."

"Did he say he thought we were hardened? And tough? And slangy?" asked Gene, suddenly, in a surprised voice.

"Not in those words, exactly," said Diantha, not able to resist the temptation of giving Gene at least one little pang in return for that rose-of-love frivolity of hers, "he intimated it, however."

"I like that!" said Gene with a scornful smile. "What was it Miss Quincy said, the other night, to you, Colleen, about the men?"

"Men are deceivers ever," said Colleen with a sigh, as if it all were too much for her to understand.

"Well, all I have got to say, Marchie, is that your precious Caspar is as big a villain as any of the men!" said Gene, indignantly. "Why, right here to-night, to my face, he had the cheek to tell me he thought me 'So clever, so beautiful and so good!' I leave it to you if he must not be a hypocrite to talk like that."

Diantha listened in amazement. She had not bargained for this—that her Caspar should have uttered to another the precious flattery he had invented for herself, Diantha March! How could it have happened? Gene had piqued him, and in his embarrassment and determination "to make her pay attention to him," he had unconsciously used the words sacred to herself. But it would never do to let the girls know she had been taken by surprise. They must not suspect her consternation at this statement of Gene's. She would contrive a way out of the difficulty by which she should show her perfect confidence in Caspar, and remove from him all blame.

"I'm sorry, Gene, you should feel like that," she said sympathetically. "But I wanted you all to like him so that I begged him to be nice and to say all the pretty things he could think up, so you see he only said that because I persuaded him to say it."

The "winter" of Gene's heart was complete, and Diantha was avenged.



CHAPTER XLIV

DIANTHA WAKES FROM A DREAM

THE next day at the office, Everton looked long and steadily into Diantha's eyes, seemingly trying to settle a very perplexing question. They had been having a long talk about the three children, the planning of whose future old Lockwood was entrusting to their care. The boy was to go to public school for a year longer and then serve as an office boy until his stern relative could see what he was "good for."

"He seems a wiry sort of a little chap," said Mr. Everton, "but needs considerable feeding up, I'm thinking. I don't deny that my heart is pretty tough on some propositions, but there is one thing I can't stand, and that is to think of little children going hungry."

Diantha felt a sympathetic response coming to her lips, but she checked herself. "It's going to be an awful responsibility," she said with decision. "I'm afraid that poor woman isn't going to last long, and that the old man is going to be grinding with them I can see. I'm terribly afraid we shall have to be father and mother to those children."

Stanley Everton gave a sudden start, then restrained himself.

"Very likely," he murmured.

Diantha seemed in a brown study, she was looking

at him and yet with unseeing eyes. "Do you know, Mr. Everton, you are awfully good to have taken so much trouble for that family? But then, it is just like you. You are always doing something generous for somebody." Then her voice lowered and she spoke in a half-shy, half-unwilling sort of way, with downcast eyes. "Do you know, I have a question I should like to ask you, if only I could put it just right."

With some curiosity, he bade her go ahead.

"It is not easy," she said, still hesitating. "It is only this, don't you think Colleen is a fine girl?"

He agreed that he did.

She went on eagerly. "But you don't know the half of her good qualities. She is an exceptional girl, so serene, so reliable, such a comfort in every way. I have been thinking it over," she continued, slowly, "and it seems to me that it would be the loveliest thing in the world if only you and Colleen would take a fancy to each other. But I suppose it is too good to be true," and she sighed.

Stanley looked her steadily in the eyes as he replied, "Colleen is a fine girl, and I love her as I would a sister, but when a man has chosen the goddess, he is not likely to be satisfied with one of her maidens."

"It seems such a pity," she murmured as if she had not heard the last part of his remark.

There was a tremendous stirring of feeling of emotion within his heart, but he held it in check and said only, "What is such a pity?"

"Oh, that we can't have you in the family," she returned, musingly. "Colleen is the only one that would

suit you, because she is homelike and so reasonable, she is a sort of little mother to us all, you know; and is the center around which our small universe is hung. She is the only one of us who has remained unaffected by our sojourn in the city. She is just as sweet and just as simple as the day she came. Of course, she has a will of her own, I must admit that, she is like a rock when she makes up her mind."

"Any more than you?" broke in Stanley.

"Yes," she replied, apparently not at all disturbed. "I really think she is, but never over trifles, fortunately. If I were a man, Colleen would be my choice of all the girls I have ever known." She said this with an air of finality as if she had proved her case.

"I won't take it under consideration for an instant —" said he abruptly. He turned on his heel suddenly and walked to the door for the street, hatless as he was. But when he got there he placed his hand to his head, discovered his lack, hesitated a moment, and then more slowly returned to Diantha's desk.

She was startled out of all calmness, and met his gaze wonderingly.

He took up his hat, gave her another intense look and departed.

She turned the leaf of her ledger but nothing could she see on the page before her. It might have been a blank for all it conveyed to her brain. She sighed and murmured discontentedly, "Oh, dear, dear, dear!"

That chance speech of his about being aware he had a tough heart, but that he could not bear to think of little children going hungry, had affected her poignantly. That

was the way she felt, too. The movement suggested by the new philanthropy in the direction of reform, that if children were made happy they would be good, was very near her heart.

She was built on a large plan, her mind was progressive. Her habit was to think of these things constantly. She could feel that her powers for reaching out and benefiting the many, were fully developed and equal to tremendous strain. By force of this habit of hers, she was the potential manager of the fates of those who could not manage wisely for themselves.

She knew, she perceived in a flash what others could not know, nor perceive, by any amount of brain-cudgeling. And having this faculty, so highly evolved as if for a purpose, it was naturally a pleasure to her to exercise it, just as a man with big muscle naturally loves to roll up his sleeves and double up his arm and flex the biceps and gaze on the tense muscles. That, men can understand. The other is an invisible power, is not to be detected even by the aid of a microscope, yet it is a more potent factor in the great movements of the world's history by far than the mere brute force of the world.

It is delicate, as is the hairspring of a watch, it is tremendous as are the stamps of a quartz-mill.

While that page remained blank before her, Diantha saw reforms being inaugurated in the great city, so that little children should not suffer from the grinding of the man-made machine, as it went on its way relentlessly and remorselessly. She saw future generations arising redeemed by the reforms of the present, by means of which the fountain-source should be kept clean and pure.

She was not altogether an idealist, she knew stringent methods would be necessary to hold back the degenerate from muddying the stream with more of their kind, to keep bad breeds from perpetuating themselves at the expense of the breeds that were worth while.

She herself would speak to women, face to face, to try to urge upon them the awful responsibility which was theirs, to keep themselves pure and wholesome and holy, refusing to mate with the mere animal-man without character or calibre, and choosing instead the finer and better qualities of man for their ideals, in guardianship of the mighty power entrusted to them in their potential motherhood.

This of itself would make for a magnificent beatification of the world. Not at once could anything be accomplished, but little by little, these ideas could be disseminated, until gentle reforms could be set in motion, so that eventually people would be educated to the necessity for common-sense methods of controlling the kind of population to be produced, so that it would result in making good citizens, instead of criminals to occupy the prisons, lunatics to fill the asylums, and the rest of the population, mostly a lot of brainless sheep following the bell-call of civilization in a mad rush and panic for wealth and death.

Even a faint *nebulæ* began to wreath itself into form in her brain that possibly men and women might be taught that there was a simpler way of living, so as to do away with the insensate needs, those terrible needs which drove them to crime in order to indulge in these will-'o-the-wisps of civilization. Then life would be worth liv-

ing. Then there would be enough for all without grinding, then the little children would be happy and good,—

A messenger-boy came in with a lot of clatter and laid a letter on her desk. Slowly she came to, recovered her senses, from her dreams and visions and saw herself sitting at her desk—a bookkeeper, merely, and with no power to carry out so much as an iota of one of her desires.

She read the letter twice before she could get the sense of it.

She laid it down listlessly. It was an invitation from Mrs. Josh for her to bring the girls and their escorts to a social dance to be given by friends of hers at a hotel on Staten Island.

So deeply had she been absorbed in her dream that she could not at once shake it off. Then as she realized the necessity for a reply to this note, slowly she read once more the contents. The word “escorts” gave her pause. Suddenly she remembered Caspar as if he had returned from a year’s journey. Caspar?

She took a full breath. Her vision faded suddenly as if the night had swallowed it up. She could hear him speaking in his confident way, “All people want is to be let alone.”

She came back to the present with a rush, hurriedly wrote a reply and sent it off by the office boy. Her ledger became visible to her, and she went back to her work.

CHAPTER XLV

"SON WILL WEAR A SASH"

AN hour later, when Stanley had returned, Diantha put the note in his hand and asked him if he cared for things like that, and "going with a gang"? He seemed amused and said he did sometimes. She asked him if this was one of the times, and he smiled again and said it was. So she invited him to make one of the party.

"The only trouble is," said he, "it will be too warm to dance. Who are these Joshes?" he asked smiling at the name, as everyone always did at first.

"Oh, just a medium, harmless sort of person who likes to join women's societies, belongs to ten of them, I believe," returned Diantha, looking again at the note. "She says that as it is so warm no one need dress up, and adds that 'Son' is going to wear a sash."

"Who is 'Son'?" he asked, still very much amused.

"I don't know," replied Diantha. "I have always heard of him, but not yet have I set eyes on him. He is doubtless the 'man-child, she has received from the Lord,' you know, we women are daft on that subject."

Stanley lifted his eyebrows slightly.

She looked at him critically and saw how well-bearded he was, that there was a strong light shining in his blue

eyes, that there was a new element in his make-up she had not realized before.

Impulsively she spoke, not being able to contain herself any longer. "I never knew until day before yesterday that you had saved my life out there on Granite Mountain," she said in a hushed way. "I seem to be piling my indebtednesses up — so that I can never repay —"

"What nonsense!" he replied, "who told you that?"

"Caspar," she replied, looking down at her desk. "Caspar thinks you are the finest man he ever met in his life — he can't praise you enough."

"It's very — kind — of — him —" he said, meditatively. "I don't deserve it."

"Yes, you do," she murmured, but a silence fell upon them, and he sought the office without trying to control his inner feelings.

If Caspar had told Diantha that he had brought his father's evening suit along with him to wear upon any particular occasion that should arise, their two wills might have been saved a mighty clash. As it was, in Colleen's desire to help matters along, she had said, in Anna's hearing, "Maybe Caspar might wear a sash to the party at Staten Island, with his summer suit, the same as 'Son.'"

But poor little Anna was new to the city and did not understand clearly what she meant by this suggestion. And in her desire to placate Caspar and not have him think them "so hardened and so tough," she made an effort to be as nice to him as she knew how, and took especial trouble to assure him that Mrs. Josh was an

old New Yorker of fine family, and that the party was to be very proper indeed.

Caspar smiled and Anna forgot her fears. "Maybe you are a little nervous about what to wear?" said she sympathetically. "Of course, that is a terrible nuisance! If you are going to spend the evening anywhere, you are expected to wear a swallow-tail coat, of course, and yet if you leave home before six o'clock to get across the bay, or to go any distance in the train, it seems—" and she let her voice sink into accents of mystery, very low and confidential, "it is very terrible to have it on. I don't know what exactly happens to any one if it should be found out."

"Probably they shoot him, as one would a mad dog," suggested Caspar, affecting to look very much alarmed.

"No—" said Anna studying him, and then Caspar smiled and the radiance of that smile charmed her so, she forgot about the dress-coat and laughed merrily.

"Can you dance?" she asked.

"A little—in the old-fashioned way—you know, I am altogether old-fashioned in everything."

"Oh, I don't think so," said she pleasantly, "but dress-suits—"

"Are as old as the hills," he replied, promptly.

"Oh, and have you got one?" She seemed pleased.

"Yes, I have my father's, he was a great man to dress up, and my mother sent it to me, thinking I might need it here, you know." There was a quizzical smile playing about the corner of his mouth.

"Oh, then, you will be all right," said she, delighted.

"I heard them say, that as it is so warm, they were not

going to be so particular as to require much dressing, and that 'Son' is going to wear a sash."

Caspar looked puzzled. "And who — is 'Son'?"

Anna answered him in all her sweet simplicity. "Oh, that is what Mrs. Josh always calls Mr. Josh when she speaks of him — you know we have none of us ever seen him. I suppose it is a pet name, so we all call him that. And I was wondering about you, and whether it would be right to put you to the expense of getting a sash just for to-morrow night, and maybe you might not have the time to get it, besides, and so —"

She hesitated to see if she were presuming in any way venturing to say so much, but he seemed much interested, and bade her go on.

"And so I thought you might not mind, if I offered to lend you one of mine."

Caspar's face wore an annoyed expression. "Do I have to wear one of those things?"

"Well, if all the others do," said Anna, gently, so as not to seem forward, "I thought you might not like to be different from the rest."

His head was thrown back impatiently. "Well, I will stand a few things," said he angrily, "and already I have stood much to satisfy the insatiate thirst of fashion to make an unlimited jackass of a man who ventures to come to New York City, but if you will excuse me, I prefer not to go to a dance arrayed in a sash, no matter how warm it is! I prefer to stand the inclemency of the weather rather than —"

"Oh, I am sorry —" said Anna, frightened at the storm which had arisen so suddenly.

"But that is all right," he said, smiling again after the storm, seeing that the little girl looked distressed by his words, and wanting her to go on talking so she would reveal those hide-and-seek dimples in her cheeks.

"Just wait a minute," she said and she ran and got something from her room. In all confidence she assured Caspar, if he would accept it, he was welcome to either her blue sash or her plaid one.

By the time Diantha returned, Caspar was in a dangerous mood.

"You will go with us?" she said in her most coaxing tone.

"He doesn't want to wear a sash," said Anna in despair, who had a desire to have him appear up-to-date, as she imagined it.

"No, I won't go — nothing would hire me to," he began, then hesitated at revealing his secret feelings on the subject of the very outrageousness of such a style for men at a dance.

"Oh, never mind the sash!" exclaimed Diantha, desperately, "if only you will give us the pleasure of your company, you can wear anything you want, from a blanket to a gunny-sack."

"Evidently," he said in a dry sort of way, as if he were disgusted with all of them.

He started for the door, making some kind of an excuse for his hurried departure. In answer to her last entreaty, he told her he didn't believe Mr. Everton would wear one of those fool-things, and if not, he might and he might not, be on the boat going over the ferry, on the following evening.

"If you see me you will know I am there!" he said, brusquely.

As he left the room, Gene turned from the window. "Funny, isn't it, why the men choose some and not others! Just imagine! Won't it be queer to see Diantha and Anna going along leading their monsters by pink ribbons, for that is what matrimony comes to after all's said and done. And we'll go on just the same!"

"There are several men left in the world," said Seddie, cheerfully. "What's the matter with Doctor Charlie after he gets to be a full-fledged tooth-carpenter? You might do worse, Gene!"

Miss Lenore lifted her eyebrows in scorn at such a proposition. "I prefer my art, to marrying any old man.—and why not you make a match with Dr. Bones?"

"Nice fellow, enough," said Seddie with a sigh, "but he isn't going to pull through, his lungs are too weak, I am afraid. He's half-starved for food now, and when he gets into the hospital work he'll be more than half-starved for air."

"Poor fellow!" exclaimed Diantha pitifully, "Mr. Everton says he ought to be sent to Colorado now. And that something has got to be done to get more rooms for the hospital—that it is wicked and stupid to let it go on any longer."

Showery smiled. "That's just like Mr. Everton—and maybe he will save him yet. You must be glad Caspar is such a picture of health."

"By the way, Marchie," broke in Gene, "you didn't mind me putting that rose in Caspar's buttonhole, did you?"

"Not in the least," said Diantha pleasantly.

"Some girls might, I know, but I didn't think you would. I can understand now how it is that you are so madly in love with him. But if he were the last man on earth, I couldn't put up with him. If we were cast away on a desert-island together from a wreck, and another ship came along, a year after, they would find me on one end, and Caspar on the other. We don't adjust."

Showery stooped down and gathered a bunch of ribbons from near her feet.

"Why, what is this?" she asked.

"Oh, it is mine," exclaimed Anna. "I was trying to lend one of my sashes to Caspar to wear to the party, like 'Son.'"

"Was that what was the matter?" laughed Diantha. "Talk of the blind leading the blind! No wonder Caspar was in arms at the idea of going there decked out like an Injun chief. It shows his good sense."

But little Anna was in despair over this badinage at her expense, till Showery came to the rescue and told her that men had sashes of their own—not colored at all, but just like a wide, black ribbon to take the place of a vest.

"My! but I'm glad Caspar didn't take it," said Anna in relief. "Why, I'd been scared to go to the party."

"Yes," said Gene, "Caspar is very fascinating, but he has the manners of a bear."

CHAPTER XLVI

JOHN QUINCY PROVES HIMSELF

IT was at noon and Stanley Everton came to Diantha's desk with the most peculiar suppressed smile playing upon his face she had ever seen.

"Why," she said with that wonderful understanding that seemed to exist between them, "is anything the matter?"

"Haven't you missed anybody lately?" he asked her. "Isn't there some tall person of your acquaintance who has utterly dropped out from the circle at Pleiades Hall?"

"Of course! You mean John Quincy—why what has happened? Won't his father let him come to see us any more? He wanted to marry little Anna last Friday night, but now I suppose it is someone else," and Diantha laughed.

"Well, no," said Everton, "it seems we have none of us done poor John justice. It seems that he has set up a will of his own and has gone to bed to remain forever."

"Well, of all the wild things! what do you mean?" she cried.

So in a few words he told her the story of how John had returned to his father's house the preceding Friday night and had waited up for his father's return to an-

nounce to him that he, the son, was going to be married, and that he, the father, owed it to him to show him some way that he could earn his living.

At this Col. Quincy had nearly choked with rage and had said, "Go to bed, you fool! You've always been a fool, and from all I can see, you always will be one."

John had admitted that in the past he had been not very clever, but that now he had come to his reason and had something to live for. At this Col. Quincy had said that in the morning he would pick out a girl that would be a credit to the family and with a fortune to support them both, if John was bent on getting married, but that he didn't want to hear another word about those Canadian girls he had been tagging around after.

"Go to bed!" he had demanded fiercely.

"Is that your last word?" John had asked patiently. And his irate father had pointed to the door.

"I'll take you at your word, father," John had said, and he had gone to his room and to bed and there he had stayed for the time in between.

"What! In this broiling hot weather?" asked Diantha, deeply interested.

"That's just exactly it," replied Everton. "He has been in a high fever and they have had the doctor and Colonel Quincy is on the verge of an apoplectic fit with rage over the whole affair. But John says as there's nothing to live for, why should he get up and put on clothes or eat or do anything else."

"Of course we haven't done him justice," exclaimed Diantha. "Why, it shows that he is made of good stuff after all. He is simply adapting himself to that misfit

of a father of his! Why, Colonel Quincy knows about as much of the needs of his son as he does of the Dai Lama of Tibet. And it is just as brave and noble of John to go to bed and stay there in order to get his father's permission to marry as if he got on a horse and went out and killed somebody, like the knights in the old tales always do. Just think of it—in weather like this!”

“It seems he has been imploring his father and his aunt to send a message to you—”

“To me?” asked Diantha.

“Yes, and at last they sent for me and I am here to deliver it,” and Everton smiled at her meaningly. “You know we have to fix up all these affairs for everybody. John says, ‘Ask Diantha what I can do.’”

Diantha sat with her chin resting on her hand. She was full of prophetic inspiration. She could see far ahead a neat home made by Anna for John and him coming to that home in the full strength of his manhood with the money he had earned by his own effort. It was a beautiful picture.

“He would have the dynamo of love behind him,” she said as one in a trance, “and that makes conquerors of men.”

Stanley was looking at her intently. “Miss Quincy was right! She said you girls would make a man of John if you had half a chance.”

But Diantha was still studying the question. “It's surely enough to make any one go to bed with a fever, it's so hopeless; for he can't keep books even. Ah! now I have it—Anna can keep the books for him and

let him be an insurance man. Why, I know some fellows not at all bright who are making three thousand a year that way. And with you and his father to help — he could work it up in time. Don't you think so?"

He nodded his head. Words were superfluous.

"The only thing is to get that father of his to yield, I don't suppose that is possible," she said.

"That's where I come in," he replied, trying to conceal the laughter ready to burst out in spite of his efforts to hold it back. "I was there last night and saw John in that great bed of carved cupids and demons enough to give anybody *mania potu* just to sleep there one night. The whole house is dark and gloomy! — needs a shake-up and is getting it all right! And there was the dog, Rompey, crawling under the bed with fear. There was the aunt weeping and the father cursing and saying John was a jackass. Well, naturally, I told him I thought it would be a good thing for John to get a nice sweet girl like Anna Murray.

"And then he wanted to know what John would live on if he refused to put up for him. 'Why,' said he, 'John couldn't earn a dollar to save his neck from the hangman.'

"Well, you should have seen John. He jumped as if he had been shot and with his long legs hanging over the side of the bed he demanded to know how much his father would bet on that proposition. It didn't take me but a moment, you know, to take up the bet. I've got a hundred on it at this moment with the understanding that if Colonel Quincy loses he is to consent to the marriage. And John was not in his bed this morning

and Colonel Quincy has just telephoned me on the subject. And I've told him and Miss Ruth to meet me out at West Eightieth Street."

Diantha sat there looking at him in amusement and bewilderment.

"What? Already?" she exclaimed.

"If I get the hundred I'll give it to Anna to start housekeeping with," he said smiling, "and I think I am going to get it. Would you like to come along and see the fun?"

"Where?" she asked, and he told her to get on her hat and they would go out to West Eightieth Street to meet Colonel Quincy and Miss Ruth, his sister.

Leaving the elevated cars they made their way to the corner of the street and waited a moment till a carriage drove by containing the two members of the Quincy family. Diantha was still wondering when Everton led the way a little further along to where the street was blocked by a van of furniture which was being unloaded and carried into an apartment house of six stories, by some movers of no particular consequence though one of them was very tall.

The carriage of the Quincy's had turned around and was now coming back. The pet dog of Miss Ruth's suddenly stood up and looked at the van and barked furiously as if in welcome. Everton came to the edge of the sidewalk and greeted them and they in turn greeted him and Miss March.

"Well, I can't stop but a moment," said Everton, hurriedly, "but I want to tell you, Colonel, that I have won as you can see for yourself if you will take a look.

And Miss March, here, is my witness." He patted Rompey, the dog, on the head, lifted his hat to Miss Ruth and to Miss March, and then went back as he had come.

Puzzled the three of them looked at the scene of bustle and confusion connected with the unloading of the van, and perceived in the tall figure of the mover a familiar look in spite of the old clothes.

Rompey barked again. The mover turned his face to them but kept bravely on with his work.

"Why, it is John!" exclaimed Miss Ruth, "how romantic!"

"Romantic, to hell," muttered his father. Diantha stood there, her head proudly held. John was upholding the honor of Pleiades Hall — a champion for little Anna.

He was struggling with a large bureau, placed upon his back, and slowly mounting the stairs to carry it within and up many stair-cases. It was not easy for him; for he was untried to such labor, but as Diantha had said, "the dynamo of love was behind him," giving him the power to do the deed.

The blood rushed to the head of Colonel Quincy to see his son a carrier of furniture in the streets of New York, yet he was struck mightily by the sight of this prodigy of labor. "Who would have believed it?" he said.

Diantha and Miss Ruth had a nice little chat together and Diantha gave her a message to give to John when he should return home, inviting him to join them in the trip to Staten Island by moonlight.

Just then John himself came and stood by the car-

riage-door and patted Rompey on the head. "Well, father, when I come home I'll bring my dollar and a-half. You can never throw that up to me again. And tomorrow I'll have another. I've got a job with this man for forty-five dollars a month. I'm going to be elemental, like Caspar, because that's what Anna likes, and Diantha here; and you've got to work if you want to be elemental."

"Well, I'll be — d—" muttered Col. Quincy pulling at his collar for more air. "Where did the cub get all that lingo?"

"Why, from these nice, sweet girls," said Aunt Ruth, with tears in her eyes. "Come, get in with us, Miss March," and then she gave the message to John. "But you'll be too tired to-night," she said, "you couldn't possibly go to Staten Island!"

John laughed gleefully.

"Yes, I can, and let us all go, father, and get acquainted. I'll see Anna and tell her all about it, and how I won for Mr. Everton, and for myself and for her."

"Please go home with me, Miss March," pleaded Miss Ruth, "I want to know you better."

It was a wonderful story Diantha brought home to the Pleiades girls that afternoon. After all had been told, and description had been given of the gloomy home of the Quincy's, and details also of that marvelous piece of carving which Everton had brought to her attention first, with its flocks of demons and cupids writhing all over it, where poor heroic John had worked out his

problem, she came to the confidences reposed in her by his aunt Ruth.

“What do you think, girls?” she said, her voice sinking into a mysterious whisper. “Miss Quincy took me up in her own room and told me the most wonderful thing you ever heard. The reason that John Quincy is going to amount to anything, in spite of everything, is because of his mother! She was brave and splendid. His father did not want any children, but she insisted on John having his life, although she paid for it with her own.”

On hearing this there was not one of them that did not sympathize with the young fellow and declare it was no wonder there was that melancholy look in his big brown eyes.

CHAPTER XLVII

STATEN ISLAND IN THE MOONLIGHT

IN after years they used to talk about that night they all spent going to and coming from the island in the wonderful moonlight and the fantastic happenings and incidents belonging to it.

In after time they would say, "Oh, do you remember that night when we all were young and so romantic and every little thing seemed so large and important and wonderful?" And others would reply, "Well, it *was* wonderful! Everything is important when one is young."

The glamour of youth! What pigment is bright enough and gilded enough to paint it! In after years some of them would have passed from earth, others have been crushed beneath the weight of sorrow, some reach joy and comfort; one of them is now in a convent, one sleeps beneath the forget-me-nots far away to the Pacific — but this night they were all young and full of mischief and merriment. It was good for old earth to know such a night for her children.

I can testify to the beauty of that night of nights, for was I not there and did I not see them all in their youth and high spirits, and was I not one of those danced with by Caspar, and who that had ever once met Caspar could forget him?

It was a muggy looking little ferryboat that was waiting at the wharf, to carry them over to Staten Island. But to John Quincy it was a silver shallop with purple sails. When Caspar arrived he was greeted with more than cordiality by Howard, as if to make up for the past.

"I want you to go with me, next Saturday, to a game between the Columns and the Pennslys," began Howard in a confidential way, "and we'll bet our money on the Pennslys." As this modern parlance was like Choctaw to Caspar, it had to be explained to him that it referred to a football contest between two rival colleges. Still Caspar seemed puzzled. He wanted to know if they, the Pennsylvanians, were better than the Columbians, or were they more likely to win.

"Better? More likely to win?" repeated Howard. "What has that to do with it? A man who wouldn't bet against the world for his own state is not worthy of the name of patriot! It will always be the regret of my life, Caspar, that I put my bet against you instead of for you. I should have won, of course, but that is not the point, I should rather lose my money on a Pennsylvanian than to win on any other state. Oh, I'm not so sordid as you may think. We'll go and lose our money, if need be, on our countrymen, but they shall hear us howling for them, just the same."

Caspar felt his blood stirring at the picture. "The Pennsylvanians against the world," he exclaimed, in a sort of mock-heroics. And the two natives of that state gripped fervently while the ebon-haired Vivian smiled

and murmured, "Do you know, you men are actually weird?"

Included in Mrs. Josh's invitation, under the generic term of escorts, were Doctor Bones and his inseparable companion, Slow Molasses. These two strugglers after fame and fortune were willing to be considered "escorts" and enjoy a cool ride on the Bay with pleasant company, as long as it did not take the bread out of their mouths.

Some day, each would be rolling in wealth, as doctor or as dentist, and they would then indulge in much merriment over the straits of poverty they had passed through in order to reach success. But at the present time it was no laughing-matter to exist as they were attempting to do, striving to attain a diploma, by sheer force of endurance, sustained mostly by liberal potations of New York atmosphere, an occasional ten cent meal and the crumbs of luxury at the picnics and parties of the Pleiades. They were hungry most of the time. It was no wonder that they were thin and somewhat tragic in appearance, and that even their jokes were somewhat threadbare.

While the clans were gathering, Caspar and Everton were left on the outside edge together, both very alert and on a tension of some strange kind not easy to define. Caspar was not of a suspicious nature, but he atoned for it in being most curious. His loyalty to this generous friend who had made success in life possible to him was unswerving. Nevertheless there came a peculiar question into his mind. Was Mr. Everton one of the thirteen men who had asked Diantha for her hand

in marriage? If so, why had she said, "No"? To add to this, if he were a disappointed suitor, why had he been so generous to him, the successful suitor?

Such magnanimity as that was almost impossible. Could he, himself, in a similar case do as much? He doubted it. And a new admiration for his benefactor sprang up in his breast, for by some kind of an instinct he was beginning to feel some strange influence in the very air about him.

On his part, Stanley was fond of Caspar on his own account, won to admire him by his manliness and integrity. He himself had had the prior claim, it was true, but Caspar was the better man, and he had been chosen. He had dared to hope, however, that he would win at the last. This was a treachery to Caspar. A set of conflicting emotions stirred his depths as he considered that if it were not for her, they two would be absolute friends, loyal and faithful.

Howard was standing near. "Well, Stanley," he said, "what are you going to do about this—affair?"

The love of hazard which was a part of Everton's nature asserted itself. "I've given up smoking, and I'm going to be temperate in everything I do; I'll never be the same man again whether I win or lose. But my last venture is this: if nothing happens in the next twenty-four hours, counting from midnight, I vow that I'll take the next steamer to Europe."

"So that is your ultimatum?" said Howard with a smile of sympathy.

"Yes," he returned earnestly, "but I wouldn't be human, if I didn't try to make something happen."

The girls were watching the arrivals. "Oh, there is Mrs. Josh, at last," cried Colleen. "We were so afraid she would be left and Vivian would have to be our only chaperone; for we weren't sure that you would come, Miss Quincy and our crowd like plenty of guardians."

But Miss Quincy was gazing at Gene, half-puzzled and quite austere. "Miss Bishop," she asked, "is not this the young lady who chaperoned you all the other night at the roof-garden and also on the yacht, or was it an older sister?"

Colleen blushed and confided the truth that it had been Miss Lenore with a gray wig on, and in borrowed clothes. And when this was told to Col. Quincy, he rallied Gene on having deceived him completely, that he wasn't half as much afraid of her now that he knew she wasn't one of those artful little widows. And Miss Lenore did not hesitate to be as artful as possible in spite of her dark hair and her lack of experience.

Caspar and Everton standing together were having a little confidence regarding the importance of the young Mr. Josh who had not yet appeared.

"I understand that 'Son' is going to wear a sash," said Caspar in a spirit of boyish mischief.

"And I have been given to understand that he is a man-child from the Lord," said Stanley, oracularly, "but somehow I don't think I am going to like 'Son'!"

The two men laughed in comrade-sympathy. They did not know, themselves, why, only that a subtle influence was at work, and they wanted to vent their peculiar feelings on some one, but certainly not on each other.

It takes a little thing to set either sheep or men going in the same direction. To please Anna, John made himself most agreeable to Mrs. Josh, who was, as Diantha had said, a most harmless woman, but easily flustered and overwhelmed. Some way all the men took the notion to overdo the polite act, in order to enjoy her confusion. Some people are inclined to show the cloven hoof at the least opportunity, and the very harmlessness of Mrs. Josh aggravated this desire on the part of the men present.

To Diantha's surprise Everton was the leader in all the good-natured pleasantry at the good lady's expense. "By the way," he spoke most confidently, "where is 'Son'—I mean your son—of course—I thought we were to have the pleasure of his society."

At this reference to her well-beloved offspring, the face of Mrs. Josh wore a Madonna-like smile of content. She announced with a conscious shyness that "Son" had brought his young lady with him and preferred to remain downstairs but that she would take great pleasure in presenting him to them all, later in the evening.

Before the ferryboat had come to a stop at its wharf on the other side of the sparkling waters, Diantha had become aware of a discomfiting feeling. That all the men-folks were taking a wicked enjoyment in poking fun at their chaperone, she had more than a suspicion. Even Slow Molasses and Dr. Bones, who never dared to act so, were being put up to it by the examples set by Everton and Caspar. What was this compact offensive and defensive between these two? What did it signify? Much as she wanted them to be friends, did she think she

liked it, when they two were arrayed against her? For they even jollied her when she tried to come to Mrs. Josh's rescue. She was quite sure she did not.

But all this was as nothing compared to a new sensation that befell them all, as they approached the place where the lanterns proclaimed a festival, and music was pouring forth an invitation to the dance. Tall and stately were the columns looming up, as if it were another Parthenon, to which they were wending their way.

A lady came running to meet the advancing host, and she was much excited.

"Oh, Mrs. Josh! what do you think," she exclaimed—"it has all been changed—and there are no free invitations for to-night, as usual, I only just now found it out. It's to be a benefit for the musicians, and a dollar a ticket."

The smile on poor Mrs. Josh's face slowly faded as this news percolated into her brain. She tried to convey the awful tidings to her cohort but the words died away on her lips.

"Cheap enough!" said Caspar, valiantly, for the crowd.

Not even those who are rolling in coin, admire being held up to pay for what is supposed to be a friendly invitation, especially when they have left their money behind in their other trousers' pocket. Besides, dress-suits have a way of their own of ignoring business and leaving it behind altogether when bound for a purely social evening. As for the poor students who were trying to get a little enjoyment out of the invitation of Mrs. Josh, this demand would take ten meals out of their

half-starved stomachs, if even they had had it with them.

"If ever I get out of this alive," muttered poor Dr. Bones, "I swear I will keep clear of these infernal society affairs."

The other was pale and sandy to which was added the pallor of the moment. He did not want to be disgraced before the girls, he had his pride to maintain. "But — what — did — they — want — to — do — it — for?" he drawled in that irrelevant way of his, that had won for him his title of "Slow Molasses."

John went back to borrow from his father. Caspar was one of those who spends but little, but he always had fifty dollars in his clothes. It is only queens and the enormously rich who can afford to go on their triumphant way, penniless.

The doctor tried to explain his plight. "The girls were very particular to tell us it was to be a Dutch treat," said he, "and I've only got my carfares."

"Never mind," said Caspar, cheerfully, "I can lend it to you."

Presently Diantha came flying to the top of the procession to tell how mortified she was over the terrible blunder.

"It's — all — right —" drawled Slow Molasses Charlie, "a little thing — like that doesn't — bother us, does it, Mr. Rhodes?"

And Caspar understood and replied, "Not at all."

"You know, I said it was all to be Dutch," she said, "and so it shall be, only I am going to borrow for the girls —" No one knew better than she what an ordeal this moment was to the poor students, no one felt the morti-

fication of it more than she. She, too, felt as if she never wanted to see poor Mrs. Josh again or ever hear of one of her invitations.

"How much do you want?" asked Caspar promptly. The word passed down the line, and amid great merriment even Howard came to Caspar for change at that most awkward moment. Caspar gave each one the needed sums, and then went forward leading the line to the splendid House of Columns in the moonlight. He had saved the situation.

Everton was affecting great gayety of spirits over the affair, and as the others passed within, he persuaded Caspar to remain with him near the door.

"Let us watch and see how 'Son' takes the situation," he whispered in a reckless sort of mischief. In his desperation he had picked on the unknown to serve as a sort of scapegoat on whom to vent his perverse feelings. He had to have some one and it should not be Caspar, that he had sworn to himself.

It was true that with his young lady, in deep conversation, Mr. Josh had loitered so far behind as not to know what was going on at the head of the procession. They two, lying in wait, saw him as he was being pulled up by the doorkeeper, a small, thin youth, rather peaked and sallow-black as to complexion and hair and eyes. He was so engrossed with his young lady that he paid no attention to the man at the door, demanding his ticket.

"Huh?" said he, finally. The man explained. Mr. Josh resented this interference, and pushed past, saying indignantly, "Where's my mother? Mother!"

At the well-known voice of her well-beloved offspring,

Mrs. Josh came flying to the rescue, and the two behind the palm tree enjoyed the scene wickedly.

"Oh, Son," she cried, "it's a dollar a piece, and I have left my purse at home, the musicians have a benefit to-night." But the explanation was superfluous. Mr. Josh squirmed, then he writhed in his effort to restrain his opinion of this swindle. Like a wax figure beside him stood his girl. He glanced at her, straightened up, put his hand in his pocket and produced a half-dollar.

Everton borrowed the amount from Caspar and came forward and said, "Permit me, Mrs. Josh!"

The poor lady was more overwhelmed than ever, and then she introduced with conscious pride, the being to whom she stood before all the world as "Mother." In another moment Caspar had joined them and there began a repetition of the previous performance on the ferry-boat, in which Mrs. Josh and her son were being made the butt of ridiculous flatteries without end. The poor lady tried to smile and look intelligent. "Son," however, did not smile nor did he try to appear knowing. Like his maternal parent he was quite lacking in the sense of humor that enables one to enter upon a joust of this kind, but where she was merely gentle, he was fierce in response. He didn't know who the two were who were having such a lot of fun at his expense, and he didn't want to know them.

He took off his overcoat, and Caspar was disappointed to observe that he was attired like the other men present, in a plain dress-suit, only with lower vest than usual. He began to be very much bothered in his mind over the way Anna had tried to persuade him to wear her gaudy

ribbons on the strength of what "Son" was going to appear in, and Diantha had lent herself to the scheme of wanting to make him ridiculous, also. He wondered if it was a new trick they all had meant to play on him. All the more did he indulge in bombastic compliments, in his resentment, as if to get even on the innocent cause of his annoyance.

All at once they became aware of the presence of Diantha in all the splendor of her white gown with spangled vest and sleeves. Her copper hair shone out like an aureole about her face. Her dark eyes looked reproach at them and in the poise of her head was disapproval. The soft folds of her skirt made graceful lines about her adding to the beauty of her appearance.

At sight of her, so splendid and spirit-like, the battery of wit died down, and the three victims made their escape.

"I can't think what has come over you two, to-night," she said more in sorrow than anger, "that you should take such pleasure in bully-ragging those poor inoffensive Joshes, whom you do not even know! It makes me think of the boys in the school-yard, picking on a boy not half their size." She turned and followed the others, and the two men looked at each other frankly.

"Oh, she is awfully angry," said Caspar.

"Appay — rently so," said Everton, in a pronunciation of his own of the word which gave it a quaintness of meaning quite opposite.

"What had we better do?" asked Caspar, as a follower of a champion whom he had sworn to follow to the bitter end. The sparkles of mischief were in Everton's eyes

as he suggested that they two go into the ballroom and dance with every other girl in the room, leaving Miss March for the last.

“The very thing,” exclaimed Caspar, full of resentment against her for the trick she had tried to play on him to make him come here decked out in a gaudy sash, like a fool.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THE MAGIC OF HUNGARIAN GOULASH

OH, but it was hot and damp that night in the ballroom of the House of Columns! Most of the men fled the scene and sought the cool rays of moonlight outside instead. Slow Molasses and Dr. Bones were already seeking windows and draughts in defiance of hygiene and etiquette but they were not at all enthusiastic any way, and were only looking forward to the welcome hour that was to take them back to the boat and away from hated Staten Island.

The young ladies in light attire, by some queer provision of nature are better endowed to endure the agonies of dancing under these torrid circumstances, but if men will not dance, what is a poor girl to do? Had it been left to women to contrive the mythological tales, they would have made Tantalus a young lady in delightful costume, sitting in a ballroom, partnerless.

All at once everything was changed as in the twinkling of an eye. Two splendid comets appeared in the deadly-dull ballroom. They were lacking in formality to an almost alarming degree. They did not ask if one would dance, they took that for granted. Indeed what else were they there for?

Gene Lenore and Colleen were simply seized and whirled out into the grand vortex, without so much as

by your leave. And presently they were rushed back to their seats and Showery and Seddie were in their places.

Every neck was craning toward the door when the next waltz was in progress in some anxiety lest they had lost their only gallants for the evening. But no! the two men-comets came running through the dancers to them all like youths on a lark. But what a surprise! There were actually Miss Quincy and Mrs. Josh, skimming across the floor like ducks on a pond. In fact they had had no time to refuse, nor to explain that their dancing-days were over, for they simply had been abducted temporarily by these gay cavaliers, for the purpose of making their revenge, or whatever it was, complete.

The girls looked sideways at Diantha, sitting there as beautiful as any of the butterflies of fashion present, being ignored thus by her betrothed, and her old-time friend, as well, so pointedly, and wondered what she thought of "these carryings-on!"

That Diantha was puzzled and annoyed, there was no doubt. The partnerless girls in the room feasted their envious eyes on the two fine-looking fellows who were giving their little coterie such a good time, she could see and know. But she felt as if these two were as much strangers to her as to them, as if she had never known either of them before. But what sort of a spirit was animating them? What was this compact between them and against herself?

On a rush they came, returning the two silver-haired partners to their places, and actually had the daring to take out to dance two of the society butterflies near, who were only too pleased to be counted in. It was actually

a most unblushing performance. There was not one of the little group from New York that was not jealous on the second. Then the two came on a rush, dropped their outsiders, and Caspar took Vivian, while Everton invited Diantha for a short whirl, for the music of that dance was nearly at an end.

The night was waxing hotter, if possible, and yet the gay lark of the men-comets continued, save that between the numbers they fled the scene, to mop their faces and get their wind. But not again was Diantha led out.

To make the eleven o'clock boat there was a great rush. Someway, Diantha was more than annoyed by the whole performance. And when she came out under the stately columns into the moonlight and found Gene Lenore pinning a flower of some sort on the lapel of Stanley Everton's coat; she was thrown into a deep resentment. By what right did Gene go around appropriating her friends? She saw them walking along together, at the head of the procession, and Caspar was with Colleen.

Slow Molasses insisted on pairing off with her, and she felt at that moment she would have enjoyed seeing him thrown into the sea.

They missed the boat by one minute, which made Col. Quincy exceedingly cross. So they gathered on the dark wharf, where the waters of the bay were swirling below ominously, and Gene insisted on pinning a flower in his buttonhole also to sweeten him up. He appeared to be mollified by this flattering of his vanity, while Gene was arguing to herself that that was the way to get along in the world, to snatch one's opportunity before it got away.

The girls, however, thought it looked "so silly."

Mrs. Josh was telling Miss Quincy, in her simple, harmless way, about Vivian, her wonderful gifts, and her goodness of heart.

"You know, she wouldn't sing in public, not for thousands of dollars, now. But when I was convalescing, just home from the hospital, she came with all her costumes, and gave me a recital, as if I were Queen Victoria. And it is perfectly beautiful, too! You'd think it was a regular vaudeville of foreigners from Europe, Asia, Africa and America. She is so dark, you know, and with that grand black hair of hers, she can make up to be the loveliest little Injun chief or Injun-mother with her papoose, you ever saw, and Arab and Hindoo — and I don't know what all. And the songs are beautiful, she got them from all those folks, herself."

"Oh," said Miss Quincy, "I have a friend, who is a hopeless invalid, she has been nowhere for years; I wonder if she would sing for her?"

"Let us ask her?" suggested Mrs. Josh.

Such a smile as illuminated Vivian's ivory tinted face.

"I shall be only too happy," she said.

"And can't I come, too?" spoke up Everton, who was trying to make something happen, unexpectedly.

"If you are very good," said Vivian.

"I'll never forget," Mrs. Josh was saying to the young lady of the raven locks, "the first night I ever saw you; it was your debut-concert, and your husband was there, too. He wasn't your husband then, of course, for it was the first time he ever saw you. And I could see then that he was in love with you, at first sight."

"Wasn't that romantic?" said Miss Quincy.

"And you were in love with him," continued poor Mrs. Josh, trying to say the nicest thing she could think of. Howard always became restive when Mrs. Josh started on this legend of hers, for it was her usual remark, revamped everytime they met.

"But I was not," insisted Vivian, half-laughing. "I always tell you I was broken-hearted that night."

"Broken-hearted?" queried Everton, with a sort of mock-seriousness. "We are all broken-hearted when it comes to that, at one time or another, but few of us recover as delightfully as you have. Now, I should like to know what you did for a cure, what magic herb of a 'Midsummer Night's Dream' you found to restore you so completely. That's what we all want to know!"

Everyone was listening. Everton had not yet quite recovered from his reckless mood and was simply talking nonsense in the hope to make something happen, he did not know what. Everyone was listening to see what he would be up to next.

Vivian gave a little laugh as she said, "It must have been the Hungarian Goulash, I don't know of anything else!"

Everyone wanted to know about it, what it was, and where it could be purchased, with such a unanimous voice that a general amusement prevailed. Diantha alone seemed not to hear the chatter and merriment.

"Well!" said Vivian, in her pretty, Frenchy sort of way, half-childish, half-matronly, by turns, "it was this way! I was never in love longer than three days at a time till I met Howard. And this was one of the times. The three days were up, and of course I was broken-

hearted," she continued, smiling. "So I sent a telegram of 'Farewell, forever,' and then feeling hungry I went to a restaurant. There on a bill-of-fare was Hungarian Goulash. Of course, languages being my forte, naturally I ordered the dish, and presto! it cured me completely."

Everton became very much interested. "Well," he exclaimed, "to think that I should have had to remain in my shattered condition all this time, just for the lack of knowing a thing like that."

While the others were laughing at this bit of fooling, he turned and looked into Diantha's eyes daringly.

She was confused, and gave her attention to an argument going on between Caspar and Anna. She could feel he was indulging in some of those weird outbreaks of his.

"That's it!" Caspar was saying, rather fiercely. "I can't understand why you wanted to make such a guy of me! What would I have looked like coming here all decked out in those gaudy sashes of yours? Why did you —"

Anna was in despair. She could never make him understand. Diantha went to her help to smooth matters over, and tried to explain.

"But you, too, insisted that 'Son' was going to wear a 'sash,'" protested Caspar, "and he never did at all. What I am trying to get at, is, what you had in your mind? Why you all wanted to make a guy of me here, before everybody?"

It was hard to manage Caspar, when once he had started on a thing like that, as Diantha knew. But she was so angered by the events of the entire evening that she had little patience to spare.

Very severely she said, "'Son' did have a sash on, as you could have seen for yourself, if you had taken the trouble to look."

Caspar wore a puzzled expression. "But I did look, he had on a belt, a wide black belt."

"Well," said she with a touch of scorn, "what did you expect he would have on?"

Still was Caspar in a state of bewilderment. "But," he spoke quickly trying to answer her implied derogation of his stupidity, "you asked me once if I had never seen the pictures in the papers, of men and women in bathing together at the summer-resorts? Now didn't you? Own up!"

She nodded impatiently.

"And I told you I hadn't taken any stock in the things except as artist's dreams, but I did see them that day with my own eyes, didn't I? the sea-woman and all the rest of it?"

"Oh, yes, but what has that got to do with anything?" She exclaimed.

Caspar was so angered that he spoke out exactly what was in his mind.

"Well, when you all made such a fuss about dressing me up in red and blue ribbons so I should be like 'Son' and escape the inclemencies of the weather, I didn't think he would have much else on, worth speaking about. I thought from what you all said, maybe all the men would be draped in sashes and nothing else."

"Hush," said Diantha, pale with anger, for Caspar's big voice had risen to stentorian tones.

The men had turned away, for although they greatly

admire the nude in the female form, they simply loathe anything that impinges on the dignity of the male form. Contrariwise, nothing so amuses women nor appeals to the levity of their judgment, more than to see the men get worsted, and especially by one of themselves, as in a case like this. There were furtive little shrieks of suppressed laughter and silly titters that simply maddened Diantha to desperation. It was a horrid moment.

"O Caspar, you will simply be the death of me," was all she could say.

She left them then, and went by herself to another wharf, where it was darker and gloomier, if possible, than the other, at any rate it was a place where she could be alone, away from that maddening crowd of silly women. Never in her life had she been so mortified, and so scandalized as upon that evening. She would never forget it as long as she lived. It was evident to her that she would have to flee to the wilderness if she married Caspar. That "if" struck her oddly.

What were those mere infractions of table-etiquette like biting his bread instead of breaking it, of putting his napkin over his shirt-front, instead of across his knee, of his pronunciation, saying "ant" for aunt, of saying "what?" instead of "beg pardon," compared with this bluntness and terrible frankness of Caspar's? How long would it take him to achieve the finesse and diplomacy of Stanley Everton, who steered his way through social Scylla's and Charybdises with such ease that one never perceived there were any dangers in the way? Was there not such a thing as a man's being too brutally elemental? Could she stand it always to be mortified

like this? And why had he not danced with her once? She loved him, she hated him, at one and the same time.

Meanwhile Colleen had come to Caspar's side, to pour oil on the troubled waters. "Caspar," she ventured, "it is all my fault."

He looked at her in a maze. "Yours?" he said, vaguely, more bewildered than ever. "Why, how can that be, you never spoke to me at all!"

"Well, it was like this," she explained. "You see, I told Anna, I thought it would be nice for you to wear a sash because I did not know you had a dress-suit, and it could be worn with your other suit instead of a vest. And she, poor child, was like you, she has only been here two months, and didn't know it is really as you say, just a belt, a wide black belt of ribbon. She wanted to be nice, poor child, and so offered — out of the innocence of her heart, what she thought would save you the expense of —"

Caspar mopped his face generally, for it had been an awful evening expending all that energy in the tropical heat, without this row at the end, which to him was like a jump from the frying-pan into the fire, literally. "Is that all?" he asked. "Why, I had an idea, that maybe it was a trick you all were playing on me."

"O Caspar!" said Colleen, still bent on mollifying him, and venturing on the use of his first name as one would soothe a fractious child, "have we ever done anything to make you feel like that? Because if we have you must let us know, and give us a chance to explain, for we wouldn't do such a thing for all the world."

The words were the simplest, but they removed all doubt from his mind.

"I'm sorry," he said, passing from storm to sunshine at once. "But you must admit that I have had a pretty tough time 'proving myself' since I came to New York. I didn't know but that you girls had put up a bet on me to see if I was such a greenhorn as to be induced to go there to-night in *puris naturalibus* — or whatever it is. And you can't blame me, now, can you? When you think of that wild automobile ride almost off the island, and the free fight at my expense over that straw hat, now, do you wonder I thought you had put up another job on me?"

But he was smiling into her eyes. And Colleen was saying to herself, how glad she was that she had at least that rose of his to keep forever.

"Of course, you have been most outrageously treated, but it is all over now," said Colleen, trying to think of something else to talk about, to change the subject.

"Did you ever taste Hungarian Goulash?" she asked him, out of the floating thoughts of her brain.

"Why, no, what is it?" he responded.

So she explained that it was a wonderful sort of stew, flavored with cloves and paprika, which was a sort of red pepper, and garnished with all kinds of vegetables known and unknown, and served up by a Hungarian.

Caspar's curiosity was aroused. "Where do you get it?" he asked. "I might try it to-morrow for my lunch." So Colleen gave him the number of a little place where she said she often went and ordered it and so could recommend it.

CHAPTER XLIX

DIANTHA GOES INTO ECLIPSE

BUT on the dark wharf, solitary as the moon in her orbit, stood Diantha.

She had reached the acute stage of her indignation. She had never felt so alone in her life, nor so irritated. She did not know whether she ever wanted to lay eyes on any of her old friends again or not, especially Caspar. In fact she harbored a wild idea to give them all the slip and return to the hotel for the night.

They all were hateful to her. She fairly ground her heel into the boards beneath her, as if she would spurn the very earth itself.

Then as she changed her position, to her surprise, she observed that some one was standing there, it was a man, it was Mr. Everton.

He said nothing so that she was forced to speak.

"Will you please go away," she said, loftily, "I wish to be alone."

He remained as if he had not heard a word, so that she was forced to repeat her request.

"You are alone," he replied, quietly, "I am here simply to protect you from — the wharf-rats — and — other vermin. Don't mind me."

"I would rather associate with rats than some people I know," she returned bitterly.

"So would I," said he soothingly.

"I hate everybody on this wharf," she continued, trying to resist the spirit of comfort which he was offering her.

He lifted his hand as if to stay her. "Oh, don't say this wharf," he objected, "because I can't subscribe to that. Just say, 'the other one,' and I am with you."

She gave a little laugh in spite of herself. He came a little nearer and then she said, "Oh, what is that? Tuberose? Dear me, it smells like a funeral. Do you mind my taking it out?"

He looked down at his lapel and gave a sniff at the posy there.

"Sure enough, it is rather strong; why, take it out, of course!"

He stood close by her side, looking into her flashing eyes as she drew out poor Gene's little offering and flung it into the dark waters below.

She seemed to feel better, somehow.

"I am very unhappy," she said in a sweet subdued sort of way, wondering why it was, that on the contrary, she had recovered her spirits, and was feeling at peace with herself and all the world.

"Oh, I am so sorry," was all he said, but it was enough.

The ferryboat was making fast to her moorings and so he led the way, and meekly she followed.

CHAPTER L

THE COURAGE OF COLLEEN

THE three men, John, Caspar, and Everton, had insisted on seeing the girls to their own door. John was happy, Caspar was contrite. Everton was the only one who felt his spirit somewhat in shadow. When Diantha tried to persuade him to get off at his own station, he seemed ready to fly into a passion and objected so fiercely she looked at him in wonderment and said no more.

The girls were all in high spirits as they walked along in the silvery moonlight, and Caspar had managed to make his peace with Diantha.

As they approached the realms of Pleiades Court, it was discovered that not one of them had remembered to fetch along the necessary talisman for the opening of the door. There they were, keyless, and it was half-past one in the morning. There was nothing left for them to do but to hunt up the habitat of "that Katy Johnson" and secure from her the "open sesame." Not understanding the circumstances of the case in the least, Caspar and Everton accompanied Diantha and Colleen in order to get the key as soon as possible to relieve the anxiety of the moment.

They came to a stop before a five-story house, where the door was wide open. Before anyone could prevent

her or realize the situation, it was Colleen who went forward and began to pick her way up the stairs to the third story in search of "that Katy." Then Caspar and Everton beheld the weird sight before them. The entrance was occupied by sleeping blacks lying there across the floor to the very threshold, trying to escape from the heat within in order to get the air from the street. Aroused to sudden wrath over the foolhardiness of such a performance, they began to demand her to return, but Diantha begged them to keep quiet. "Don't say anything, you will only make it worse," she exclaimed.

Presently Colleen appeared and seemed much pleased that she had gotten the key so quickly. Caspar sprang and caught her by the hand. "Promise me you will never do such a thing again," he demanded.

"Such courage," exclaimed Everton, "but you ought not to do it, Miss Bishop—it is all wrong."

"Yes, it was a regular Doré picture in there, just like Hades," agreed Colleen, "but it never occurred to me to be afraid."

When they returned to the home of the Pleiades every one was glad that that ordeal was over and all safely within. As the three men walked down the street, Caspar remarked that they ought to have a man around to look after them, and the other two agreed with him. As they were parting, Everton took out his watch. "I am thinking of leaving on Saturday for Europe," he said. "In twenty-four hours I shall know whether I am going or not."

CHAPTER LI

PAPRIKA FOR FOUR

AT the approach of the noon-hour next day, old Horace J. Lockwood stopped a moment to speak to Diantha about their plans for the proper housing of the children he had been persuaded to befriend. He expressed the wish that she would see to the matter for him, as he was not feeling first-rate, and would have to take a rest in the country, by the doctor's orders. He added that he was about to make a new will, and that he intended to make her one of the trustees to carry out his wishes in the plans he considered to be for their good.

She was completely taken by surprise. And then she began to think ahead a little. How would this obligation affect her own life? Would anything have to be altered in consequence of accepting this duty? There was Caspar! She answered at once.

"Oh, Mr. Lockwood, I am sure it is very kind of you," she said, full of suppressed excitement, "but an obligation like that is a serious thing, I must consider; for I am going to be married, and probably, yes, very likely, I shall move West to live."

That was best — the wilderness was for her and Caspar, who was too brutally elemental for the city.

Horace Lockwood looked at her steadily through his shaggy brows.

"What nonsense," said he, sharply, "Ain't you goin' to marry Stanley?"

She let her eyes drop and replied, "Oh, no, I am going to marry Mr. Rhodes."

"Of all things!" he exclaimed. "Not but that Caspar's a good fellow; he can wallop most anythin' goin', I should say—but I thought you had sense enough to appreciate a man like Stanley. But that's just like a woman, go and spoil everything." And he went out grumbling under his breath.

Here he had found out what to do all nice and pat and here it had to be all upset by the fool-nonsense of a woman.

Diantha was lost in a brown study for a moment, then she put her hat on, and went out for her lunch. She sought the little unnoticeable corner not far away, which made a specialty of foreign dishes. She was thinking of Vivian and wondering how it would seem for her to send a telegram of "farewell forever" to Caspar. But she loved him and could not give him up, though all the world demanded it.

He was her Caspar and she preferred him and the wilderness to any one else and the whole world.

She found a small table where she could be alone with her thoughts, which were very intense just then. She gave her order, and then sat resuming her brown study as before. She neither saw nor heard.

So absorbed was she in her meditations that she was unaware that some one was standing by her side asking

a question. It was Everton and he wanted to know if she minded his sitting at her table as there was something he wanted to talk to her about. She acquiesced in a dumb sort of way while Everton told the waiter to fetch his order to this table.

"I didn't sleep much this morning," he began. "I am troubled—yes, really troubled about you and all you girls living there alone and doing those terrible things. It isn't safe, you know."

"Wasn't Colleen brave though," demanded Diantha, full of admiration for her friend; "there's a girl for you!"

Presently they were served and the orders were the same, which seemed to strike each of them a little peculiarly.

"What are you getting broken-hearted fodder for?" he asked discontentedly.

"Oh, just for a change," she said returning enthusiastically to her former theme with, "Speaking of Colleen, isn't she the most wonderful combination of strength and weakness? Even Caspar appreciates her; haven't you noticed it? Even, Caspar?"

Everton winced as if in pain. He gritted his teeth together. A strange pallor came over his face. Diantha watched him fascinated and yet frightened.

He recovered himself somewhat and said, "This goulash is full of paprika." Then with painful politeness he began to speak. His blue eyes were darkling with emotion, and the man who abode in that human temple looked out at her in an agony of some kind she could not understand.

"You say, 'Even Caspar!'" he remarked frigidly. "Now, will you kindly tell me what you mean by that?"

She sat there simply dumb, and he continued relentlessly, "Is Caspar so different from all other men on this earth that he occupies a classification all by himself? Is Caspar the sum total of all perfection, all nobility, with all the princely qualities of superhuman creation? Just inform me, kindly, what it is you do mean!"

Diantha was thoroughly alarmed. What had she said to awaken such sarcasm, such bitterness of speech, as this, so unexpectedly?

"I don't mean any of those things," she said quietly. "You know as well as I do, that Caspar is not any of those things you mention, that he is selfish, that he is crude, that he has a bad temper, that he is—" her voice failed altogether, and she was covered with mortification at her own words—"almost brutal."

"Don't be troubled," he said, more gently, "never mind, let it go."

"But I will explain what I mean," she said, brokenly. "You remember our talk, long ago—or was it only last spring? Yes, last spring, when I told you I wanted to find my elemental man, some one who was without the veneer or artificiality of civilization, fresh from the hand of nature, with all his faults! I only asked that he should be true, and faithful, and pure, waiting for me as I was waiting for him, and you required that he be a manly fighter as well, before you would believe in him."

She paused and he bade her go on, that it was all so, as she had told it.

"Well," she said, plucking up her courage again, "you have said he is all you could have asked, and you have believed in him as I have, and that is why I think so much of you, Mr. Everton," she took on a warmth of emotion and a tinge of color that made her positively beautiful in his eyes. "That is why I admire you so much, and why I respect you so, you have been so good to Caspar, so magnanimous, and I just love you for it." Her tears were rolling down her cheeks, and she was trying to hide her face by bending over her plate.

"Oh, my! you will spoil your goulash," said he. "It will all be salty."

She had to laugh a little, but resolutely she went on. "And when I say, 'even Caspar,' I mean specially the elemental side of him as shown in his tastes, unspotted by city-life, free from artificiality. He is natural, normal, unspotted, unhardened, with a fresh, sweet, clean taste for everything. And even he can see that Colleen in her modesty and simplicity is a girl to be found only once in a hundred thousand. That's all I mean."

Everton seemed subdued. Then a look of discontentment crept into his face and a tinge of it sounded in his voice. "And don't you think I am elemental enough to perceive that, too?"

Diantha began to feel much relieved. Her eyes were gleaming with a thousand unspoken thoughts that rushed to her lips and would not be stayed. She went on to tell him that she had never been more surprised in her life

than the day when he had arrived in Boulder Camp, and had looked so different with his full beard, and the way he had climbed that mountain and put up that flag, and all the fine things he had done while they were camping had kept her in a state of wonderment. "Yes, and when you fought so, the night the safe was robbed, you and Caspar with that brute with the brass knuckles; yes, that night, I almost thought you elemental, too."

"And why not altogether?" he asked determinedly.

She was disconcerted by the question. "How could I, when I remembered that idea of yours, about wanting to marry that broken-down widow without any illusions and then your asking me?"

"Illusions be—!" he exclaimed angrily. "Oh, I beg your pardon, but I am so tired and sick of that confounded speech."

"It's all right," she said calmly, "there are worse things than swearing—the girls say that a man has to be let have a few devils to keep the place from being inhabited by seven, and that if there is nothing worse than a swearing and a smoking devil in him that he is lucky."

"Oh, you Pleiades girls have settled everything, it seems," he remarked dejectedly. "But I want to tell you right now that that speech, that silly saying, was not original with me. I had heard Quincy say it at the club, and it struck me as rather comical to say it back to him on that most unfortunate day as it happened, for you to overhear."

Diantha was gazing at him in a kind of a spell. "It

doesn't sound like you," she murmured, "and it does sound like him! And you never thought it up, yourself — and you never meant it?"

"Nope," he said, half sorrowfully, half comically, as was his way, he never wore his heart upon his sleeve and concealed his feelings always.

"And maybe you have not been his boon companion for the last ten years either," she continued. "Maybe he lied when he said so?"

"He certainly exaggerated," replied Stanley, "for while I have belonged to the club for five years, I never cared for the man until he took me into his confidence last spring about his son, and then I tried to help him out with his problem. You know, he never came into the office until that day?"

She remembered that it was so. "One thing more," she exclaimed. "May I ask why it was you never married the young lady who stood under the apple blossoms with you — your first love?"

"Because she married another fellow, and I could never get over it till — you came!" He spoke in such a low tone she barely caught the words.

"Why, Diantha! and Mr. Everton," came an exclamation close to her ear from one whose voice she knew absolutely. She looked up to see some one standing by her side. It was Colleen, and there was some one with her. She saw it was Caspar, and there was an odd look on his face.

Undoubtedly it did appear strange that she and Mr. Everton should be lunching together this way. No one could ever believe it was mere accident.

And how did it happen that Colleen and Caspar were together? She remembered then that Colleen had told her how she had smoothed Caspar down the night before, by changing the subject to the discussing of the dish that Vivian had made out was so mysterious and interesting.

"I just met Mr. Rhodes outside," said Colleen, in explanation, "and we decided to come in and try some Hungarian Goulash." She looked at the table, at the scarcely tasted dishes before them, and said, "Why, you've been trying it, too! Isn't that just too funny?"

And three of them laughed. But on Caspar's face there was no hint of a smile.

"It's something like a Midsummer Night's Dream," suggested Everton as he rose and pulled out his watch. "I have just eleven hours left," he added *sotto voce*.

"Eleven hours?" repeated Diantha.

"Yes, I am expecting to take next Saturday's steamer for London," he said pleasantly. "It will be decided during the next eleven hours."

Then he made his excuses and departed.

As the waiter cleared the place for them, Diantha gazed on the two with acute eyes. How easily they seemed to get along together! How well Colleen seemed to know how to manage Caspar! What if—but she banished the thought.

There seemed to be a cloud on Caspar's brow. He made no response to their little sallies of forced gaiety to bridge over the moment, and its awkwardness generally.

Colleen's purse lay on the table beside her, and it

was partly open. Diantha thought she perceived something there that was not usually found in purses. She scarcely heard what Colleen was saying. By an adroit movement she put her napkin down in such a way that it jerked the purse quite open and cast the contents out in a heap.

"Oh," cried Colleen as if she had been hurt, and she placed her hand over the little heap of dimes, nickles, bits of paper with memoranda, and a strange crushed bunch of pink stuff that might have been a sample of wool. Caspar, being a man, was oblivious of this bit of byplay.

Diantha, being a woman, recognized in the bunch of stuff, the rose of love which Gene had placed in Caspar's buttonhole, which she had torn out in her righteous indignation and crushed beneath her foot, and perceived that it had been gathered up tenderly by Colleen to be cherished as something precious.

Sweet, modest Colleen was content to worship Caspar from afar. She never flirted, she never was foolish or silly in any way, she was worthy of the best. And here was her simple little romance, and Caspar would never know.

Diantha looked at Caspar. "Shall you be around early?" she said. And there came that wonderful radiance into his face that always held her spellbound.

"Yes," he said, "and shall we take a walk?"

"Oh, no, it is the night of our Single Tax meeting," she protested, "I wouldn't miss it for the world, but if you come real early, we can have a walk for fifteen minutes or so."

“Do I have to go to the meeting?” he asked.

“If you want to make me very, very happy,” she said pleadingly, “you will go with me and see what it is all about — just for this once!”

He smiled again. “Of course, I will,” he replied brightly, joyfully, “and then when we once get that over, everything will be all right!”

CHAPTER LII

DIANTHA HEARS SOME SURPRISING THINGS

AS the young women were preparing for the evening, hurrying to get dinner through, many pleasantries were being indulged in. Both Diantha and little Anna were fair game under the peculiar circumstances of the situation.

"What shall you do with that gloomy furniture of the Quincy's, Anna, when you go there to live?" asked Gene. "I'd sell it if it were mine and buy instead that grand Lohengrin-and-the-Swan bedstead that they have on exhibition in the window, down on Broadway, if I were you. It would be so sweet to sleep in."

But Anna declared she preferred white iron and brass like Vivian had.

"Why don't you, Diantha, why don't you get that Swan bedstead?" still harped Gene Lenore, trying to tease her, "it would just suit Caspar, it is so appropriate to him."

"Oh," said Colleen, "why! they are going to build a lodge of two great rooms with a chimney in the center, — won't that be fine? I just love immense rooms like that after these cupboards we are living in here in New York."

Diantha seemed taken by surprise, and wanted to know how Colleen had found all this out.

"Oh!" she said cheerfully, "Caspar told me all about it. I think you two will be so happy you won't want Swan bedsteads—just a couch with furs and bear-skins on the floor, and a great big fireplace, and shall you have shelves around with blue plates on? That's what we ought to give her, girls, for a wedding present."

Diantha looked at her curiously. This was the first time Diantha had heard about Caspar's ideas on architecture. She rather liked them, but it struck her oddly that it should be from Colleen that she heard of them first.

They all sat down to dinner. But Diantha was trying to understand things. There was no doubt that she and Caspar had been so busy fighting all the while that there was no chance to talk about sensible things like that elemental lodge.

Gene was telling them all of a grand idea she had about a novel she was going to write. It was to be the most amazing story of a girl who was plain and thin—thin as a bean-pole, but endowed with the nature of a Cleopatra. She was to be angular and skinny with hollows like saltcellars in her neck, but to have the warm heart of a Venus.

Seddie thought it would not be popular, that no one would buy it.

"Wouldn't they?" cried Gene, "I bet you that the day the publishers announced it for sale that ten thousand bean-poles of girls would be knocking on the doors at eight o'clock in the morning to get a copy and it would make a sensation."

Colleen wanted to know what put such an idea into her head.

"Why," said she with a wave of her long lean arm, "because I know something about it. Why shouldn't a plain girl want to be loved and adored and wear beautiful clothes and exert power in the world the same as one who is plump and beautiful? Why, because her nose is a little too short and her upper lip is a little too long, should she be lacking in fire and ambition and love of splendor?"

Diantha began to wake up at such revelations as these. "But what's the good of being a Cleopatra or a Venus?"

"Ye gods!" cried Gene, "Why, it's fame — deathless fame and glory."

"Pooh," said Diantha, "I never heard of one yet that didn't wind up miserably! Look at that wretched Emma, Lady Hamilton, who was a beggar and an outcast before she died. And the girl in California who was found to have all the proportions of the Venus, what became of her? Why, she was shot down in the street by one of her lovers, and died there like a dog. Oh, Gene, Gene, we can't afford to think things like that."

"Why not?" Gene was angry.

"Because some day we are going to be mothers, and then we should be ashamed." Diantha's voice was low but thrilling. "The homeliest woman on earth is beautiful to her children, the homeliest woman can have the bravest, most beautiful and finest children — it all lies with her and what she thinks and desires. Look at

Abraham Lincoln's mother! She must have had grand thoughts in her heart and brain before that child was born! He was not like any of the rest of the family either before or after. You can't explain him any other way."

"Yes, indeed!" said Seddie, "the greatness of Lincoln is the despair of believers in heredity. And any way, it goes all to pieces in the light of the last census. What do you think? Why, it has been discovered that ninety-eight per cent. of the criminals come from respectable parentage."

A hush fell on them all.

"It is because the mothers were thwarted and compelled to do what they didn't want to do," finally said Diantha, "and they marked their children with their unsatisfied desires. But women can even arise above that. It is we, Gene, we who can make the world what we will."

Miss Lenore, calmed down by this time, wanted to know if she really believed that that was all true. Diantha assured her that she did.

"You don't mean to say, Marchie, surely not, that it makes no difference what kind of a man you marry?" asked Gene, pointedly. "I was thinking the other day, that if I had had a good father like yours, maybe — I might have been — different."

"Of course, I didn't mean that exactly." Diantha seemed confused by this pathetic admission of Gene's. "But it is this way. It isn't so much whether the man is gifted or whether he is religious or of fine quality himself, as it is whether he is kind and magnanimous

and patient with his wife and the to-be-mother of his children. They will be superior if he lets her be free, you know, and doesn't dominate her every minute; lets her call her soul her own. Just by being considerate and letting her love him, they can have finer children than they are themselves. Something mysterious and wonderful comes in just like the spirit of God in a case like that to make a new heredity that never was before and never may be again."

"That's pretty fine," said Gene musingly. "I'd like to be the mother of a genius, an orator, or great statesman, that would make me proud. What sort of children are you planning to have, Diantha?"

"Oh, I've got to hurry," she exclaimed, rising from the table, hastily, "just healthy and sensible and good and brave—that's enough to ask."

She flew off to get on her things and away from them all.

CHAPTER LIII

DIANTHA'S GREAT TEMPTATION

CASPAR was as good as his word. She had reckoned on his being prompt and so found him in the vestibule, downstairs, about to ring for admission. He was in good humor, and pink as to color; for there was no touch of sluggishness about his circulation. He was alive and radiating life from his own excess of vital essence.

"I have been hearing the most interesting things," she began confidentially. "It is about the kind of a house we are going to live in, a lodge, Colleen called it, with two great rooms and a mighty chimney and fireplace in the middle, and shelves around with blue plates on."

Caspar laughed. "I hadn't heard about the blue plates before," he said comically.

"And where is this lodge of ours going to be built?" she queried.

He was serious in an instant. "Oh, that is just what I want you to decide. Could you be content in the wilderness in my kind of a house, or must you go on living in these chicken-coops here in the city?"

"I suppose you would not be happy here," she said slowly, for she had found that she loved the city.

"How can I?" he exclaimed. "My lungs are fairly

starved for oxygen in these tiny spaces. I want a mountain behind us, and five acres in front of us and the smoke from no man's chimney in sight from my door. Don't you feel that way, dearest?"

She felt herself coming under his spell as usual. "Yes," she murmured under the influence of the moment, "yes, that is best after all."

She could see that delightful elemental house of two great rooms with the chimney in between, and furs and redwood furniture roughly made. What a nest in which to rear her young! What splendid lungs they would have and what hearty little fellows they would be! She could see herself in the midst of them, like Thusnelda, before she was torn away from her Hermann in the wilds of Teutonia to grace the triumph of Germanicus, a splendid type of motherhood, such as she had always dreamed.

"Oh," she said suddenly, "we must go to the Metropolitan Museum, Caspar. I must show you the glorious picture of Thusnelda, it is my favorite."

"You are very fond of pictures," he said, smiling. "I'm almost afraid you won't be able to stand that bare-walled lodge of ours."

"Oh, we can buy a few pictures," she became confused all at once. "I mean my aunt will give us a few for our walls, she won't miss them, I'm sure."

There was a strange look creeping over the face of Caspar.

"Tell me about that aunt of yours. First you say 'buy,' then you fall back on that mysterious aunt. I can't quite seem to make it out."

Diantha knew she was walking into trouble, for she was not gifted in the art of prevarication. Wearily she thought to herself, must it always be like this, to be cast down into the regions of despair, every time she saw the heavenly visions unfolding above her?

"Well, I must admit," she blundered along, "that my aunt Diantha is a rather eccentric person. She lives like a hermit all alone in a big house in Boston, and she has made her will in my favor. It isn't much — just a few thousands, but I am sure it will come in very handy when we get ready to build that lodge of ours," she said with forced gayety trying to get back to the wilderness as soon as possible.

Caspar looked at her horrifiedly. "You don't calculate on the poor old lady's dying just to suit us, I hope! That seems to me to be very cold-blooded, to be building one's hopes of gain on the death of a relative."

"You are right, Caspar," said she, in desperation; "it is simply disgusting, just like in effete monarchies, and I don't care if the old lady lives to be a hundred. We'll get along without her help even if we starve."

"Oh, it isn't going to be as bad as that, we can both economize, you know, for the future," he said slowly. "I expect you will have to patch the little trousers as my mother did mine. But I used to be proud of those patches — it doesn't hurt a boy to wear them a bit."

Diantha felt her heart give a leap. She was not afraid of the hardships. Her own mother had done the same. If only she could wipe out those lies and the de-

ception she had practiced upon him what a joyful prospect would be before her!

Motherhood was calling her in all its holiness and sacredness. It was motherhood first and wifedom second in importance to her.

A way out of the doubts and perplexities that assailed her came into her mind like a flash of lightning. She would marry Caspar the next day secretly — he would be only too glad to escape having anyone else around — and then when it suited her, she would tell him everything.

More and more alluring grew the fair temptation. After they were married he would have to forgive her and pretty soon he would forget about it in the stress of daily life and be only too glad she had a nice little sum to help out towards that future that stretched before them.

A doubt came. Maybe he would not forget and would throw it up to her till she grew to hate him. Maybe he might become a surly brute at being conquered by her and deteriorate instead of growing, as she had hoped, milder and gentler with the passing of the years. And she might become a virago.

"Dearest," he was saying, "I expect to be going back to Boulder Camp in about three weeks. Couldn't you go back with me?"

"Are you sure, Caspar, that you will not regret it?" she asked him promptly. "You will have to promise me to be very patient and forbearing for the first year; for I am not easy to get along with, you know, nor are you."

"Why, of course!" he exclaimed, "we'll have to put up with each other the same as other folks do. But we'll be all right, never fear, for I have such faith in you and you have such faith in me."

Diantha laughed hysterically. Her conscience hurt her so at taking advantage of this blundering innocent of a man that she felt as if she could strike him. Why not punish him for all the misery he had caused her by his blundering and his utter outrageousness? Surly brute or no surly brute, virago or no virago, she would marry him the same as other people married, go over the precipice and be done with it.

But what she said was this, "Caspar, dear, I am going to give you a great surprise, if you say so, I'll meet you to-morrow, at noon, and go over — the precipice — with you —" she faltered in spite of her resolution.

Caspar stopped where he was and looked at her in great alarm. "Do you think you are quite right?" he asked. "Sometimes it seems as if you were out of your mind."

But she was laughing mirthlessly to cover up her confusion as if she had only been joking. "Matrimony is a precipice," she tried to explain, "you get married and you go over. Maybe you land and maybe you break every bone in your body. That's the proposition. Besides, Caspar, any woman who loved you would naturally have to be out of her mind or else she couldn't do it."

A reprieve. Caspar had not caught on to what she had said — she could draw back, even now, from the fatal edge of the precipice. What was the matter with

her, why was she so glad he had not understood? Maybe she was losing her mind and getting love-crazed, she had heard of such things. Maybe it was his strong physical attraction that drew her so like a moth to the flame. Maybe mind and reason were trying to hold her back.

Thus they approached the hall where held forth the faithful in pursuit of the principles of the Single Tax theory of government.

There came a ray of hope into her consciousness. If Caspar became interested in her beloved Henry George society it would prove to her that there was a mental bond between them as well as a physical one, and that she was not a moth dazzled by the flame. Otherwise, the sooner she found this thing out the better. She was marrying to satisfy her natural instinct for motherhood, not for wifehood. But under these circumstances what sort of children would she have, to bear and rear and break her heart over?

All at once there came a revelation to her. A woman who was afraid of her husband, even though he, himself, were a good man and a brave man, could become the mother of cowards and criminals, evolved from her own dark moods and deceptions. What a blundering old world not to have taught that in the beginning! That was why ninety-eight per cent. of criminals come from respectable parentage, she thought to herself.

If she married Caspar her children would be physically strong, but what was that to their being morally healthy? Her sons might turn out bullies like Lockwood, and her daughters be insubordinate and run away

from home and go the way that unfortunate Ray had done. For she herself, a grown woman, had deteriorated in fear of Caspar's wrath. He had inspired her with fear lest she lose him, and she was now meditating marrying him under false pretenses, that was what it came to in the end.

John Quincy had had a fighting chance to become a man even after he was grown because his mother had had stamina and had stood out against his father that he might have life. Even naughty little Tommy would turn out all right because Ellen had refused to be afraid. With all that knowledge at her disposal surely she, Diantha March, the daughter of her father and mother, would not plunge into life-long misery to become what?

"The mother of cowards and criminals!" she said to herself.

CHAPTER LIV

FIRST IT WAS KING GEORGE, THEN IT WAS HENRY GEORGE

THUS it was that Caspar and Diantha passed into the meeting of the Single Taxers and the first person Diantha saw there was Everton, all alive and keen as if his first youth had come back to him.

John was there and the girls. Amid the discourse that followed Caspar yawned audibly. Diantha tried in vain to make excuses for him. At one of the brilliant remarks of the chief speaker, Everton glanced at her once more as he had done at the festival at Boulder Camp, with the eloquence of a complete understanding. It all came to an end at ten o'clock, and Colleen invited the three men to go home with them and have some peaches and cream.

They all made a dash for the surface-cars in order to enjoy the delightful fresh air thus afforded. In the scramble for places, Everton managed to get Diantha off with himself from the crowd. She seemed pensive.

"You will never know how sorry I am about your going away," she said, "I don't see how the office can spare you, especially now that Mr. Lockwood is not well. It seems so strange about your going — so suddenly."

Everton gazed at her with eyes that were positively brilliant with suppressed emotion. There was a freshness in his cheek, a youthful expectancy in his manner.

He seemed to be in possession of some secret that was acting upon him like an electric spark. It was not the glamour of spring this time, alone, that was animating him, it was the possibility of losing on the last casting of the die, the only thing in the world that had been refused him. Denial had only made him the more determined. Yet he had made a compact with himself at this eleventh hour to leave all to chance. He would not be guilty of a treachery to Caspar, but if something accidental should happen he would not hesitate to grasp it if thereby he could win for himself the girl who thus sat so mildly by his side, unconscious of all these wild emotions that were pulsating through his veins. It was his last hazard.

He looked at his watch, and said it was quite likely that he should go. "I shall know in one hour and forty minutes," he said.

"A telegram, I suppose," she murmured.

He changed the subject by saying he thought they were seeing the last of the hot weather. "The fall of the year will soon be upon us," he remarked meditatively.

For some reason Diantha felt somber and she began quoting a favorite poem, to fit the subject.

"'Tis sad to see the summer go,
 'Tis sad to lose of kith or friend,
 And yet, 'tis better ordered so;
 'Tis best our earthly joys should end.
 Though Summer, aye, though Love depart,
 They'll come again to cheer the heart—
 Sans sadness, sans alloy.' "

"Do you believe that?" he asked her sharply.

She gave him a flash from her eyes. "It is good philosophy, at any rate," she responded. "And when things get so bad they can't be worse, that's all that's left to us."

He was roused to a sudden discontent that could not be concealed. "Well, there is nothing like being cheerful over the other fellow's miseries," he said, mockingly.

Something happened to her brain.

"Well, what else can I do?" she exclaimed angrily, "it's all your fault!"

She did not know why she had made such a remark as this any more than he did. She was mystified at herself.

As they left the car, and went from Columbus Avenue to their own street, Caspar walked by her side.

"Let's talk about that lodge of ours," he said, smiling. "I don't suppose we can build it for a while yet, but we can plan it."

His voice sank to a low tone and he drew her arm into his and held her hand tightly in his own. "Don't you think we could set the date — now — for our marriage?"

"Maybe," she said musingly, but she was thinking about Stanley Everton. Then in anger, she roused herself to listen to what Caspar was saying.

"Did you like the meeting?" she asked, perfunctorily, still wondering what had been the matter with Mr. Everton, and why it was that he looked so brilliant and alive.

"Oh, no, I thought it a great bore," said Caspar, wearily.

"A great bore?" she repeated, waking up suddenly, and freeing her hand from his clasp, and her arm from his. "Why, Caspar, you don't know what you are saying."

"Don't I though? Well, I thought they never would get through with their meddling with words!"

She gazed at him in sudden fright. This was the contingency of chance on which she had staked everything. It almost seemed sinister for him to be so shameless about his contempt for all these things she held so dear. Was there no mental bond between them after all? Was it all physical?

"But if I am to go West with you, Caspar," she demanded, "and make a home there, I firmly expect to establish a Single Tax society and introduce these principles in which I believe. You may as well understand it now as any time, that I will not live without my Henry George society!"

Diantha was pale and her eyes were glittering with suppressed excitement.

"What's the good of it?" he asked, bluntly.

She tried to tell him in a few words, but this cruel stripping of the flesh from the bones and demanding the mere skeleton of her cherished theory, left her without eloquence or wits.

"Oh, that's the dream of a visionary," he replied, after her explanation of the government taking the land to itself and establishing a graduated tax according to

the values, so that the rich should pay their proper share of the taxation, and the burden fall less on the poor.

"Men will be men," he insisted, "and governments are only men after all. You can't cure human nature by taking refuge behind the government, any more than you can cure wolves of hunger by feeding them on laws. There will always be undue influence, and bribery, and corruption. Not even Christ can banish those things from the world, so how can you expect Henry George to do it?"

Diantha was all in a tremble as she heard these iconoclastic words of his. "Well," she managed to say at last, "I am glad I have found you out in time." She was very white, but her eyes shone like stars.

He could not understand. "First it was King George," he said, "and now it is Henry George that has come to make trouble. What has he got to do with us?"

"Everything—" she said weakly. But he only laughed at her.

They were at the head of the procession, and she managed to open the door when they reached the house, and slip in so adroitly, that she got away from them all and went to her own room to hide herself from sight.

It was a pleasant little moment for the other girls and they trooped in and helped Colleen to rush the little banquet on to the table. Everton was placed in the seat of honor by Gene, and John was simply beaming with delight to find himself between Showery and Anna

once more at the happy board which to him seemed the quintessence of home.

The sliced peaches were being served, while Colleen went to the ice chest for the cream. The hall was dark but there on the coal-box sat a man. It was Caspar, solitary and alone.

"Why, what is the matter?" she asked, compassionate at once. "You and Diantha haven't been having another fuss?"

He seemed very suppressed. "I'm afraid we have," he said.

"Here, Seddie, do take this cream and put the spoons on," urged Colleen, handing the supper over to another, as soon as she realized her offices were required to soothe some one who was in need of such attention.

"Tell me, what is it all about, this time?" she asked, yearningly.

Caspar arose and mopped his face, furiously. "Did you think that was a particularly entertaining discourse we had to listen to, to-night? Now honestly?" he demanded.

"Well, of course, it must have been rather blind to you, seeing it was the first time you have heard these arguments presented so technically," said Colleen guardedly. "But when you once understand it all, it seems to be just what you want to hear."

"Well, I don't think I'd like it in a thousand years," he protested with drawn-down brows.

"Oh, you didn't hurt Diantha's feelings saying anything like that I hope," exclaimed Colleen. Caspar sat

down on the coal-box and rumped his hair all up and wrestled with himself, generally.

"I suppose it wasn't very kind of me," he admitted, finally.

"Of course not," said she, "why, the sun rises and sets with Henry George, to Diantha—he is her religion."

It was but a moment until Colleen had brought her influence to bear on Diantha, bringing her from her room to the hall, and telling her to make up with Caspar and not keep them all in such hot water all the time, and then like a little mother, she returned to the serving of her supper.

Diantha seemed calm and resolute.

"Dear Caspar," she said, in a strange set voice, "do you know, I am sure we shall always be the best of friends." She sat down beside him on the sacred shrine. "I shall always admire you and perhaps love you in a certain kind of way."

"What are you going to do?" he asked huskily.

"But it was never meant that we two should marry, I am quite sure!"

"Oh, yes, it was," he protested.

She still was so angry that she kept saying things that came from that subconscious self of hers, without knowing where she was going to pull up, in the least.

"It is the strangest mistake I ever came across that we two should have gotten into our heads that we are adapted to each other. You are for all the world just like my brother, Dan; we love each other devotedly, but

we fight all the time. We are too much alike ever to be happy."

He tried to interrupt her, but she went on mercilessly.

"I am not the one for you, Caspar. It is Colleen you should marry. She is mild and gentle, even if she is brave. She is willing to ask of her husband what opinions he will permit her to have. But I, never! I cannot yield my very soul and spirit to ask, 'What is it you would have your handmaiden to do at such and such an hour? Kindly place the heel of thy foot upon thy handmaiden's neck!'"

Caspar arose and stood before her covered with embarrassment.

"Diantha!" he implored, "what have I said?"

"You would rob me of everything in life I hold dear," she exclaimed, "and I realize that I cannot submit."

He knelt down in front of her, and took her hands in his. "Sweetheart, let us talk about that lodge of ours out in the wilderness away from all this miserable city," he pleaded.

She gave a great sigh as she pushed that vagrant lock back from his forehead. What was she doing? She didn't know. She seemed to be acting from an unknown, unconscious sort of motive. She was necessary to others in this world. She had a power within her for doing good, for managing and planning for others. It was a delight to her. She was not content just to reform herself, she wanted to bring aid to the afflicted.

She could understand the last words of the dying

philanthropist. "I want to get well, I have a work to do, I want to be a friend to the friendless, a voice for the voiceless."

She knew what that power was. Even crabbed old Mr. Lockwood comprehended that she had that gift. He wanted to entrust those children to her care, he knew they would be safe in her hands. He was willing to trust her judgment. She did not want to lead an idle life nor yet a mere domestic life, she wanted to reach out and exert the power she felt stirring within her. Caspar would hold her in the palm of his hand, she should become a prisoner, the slave of his affection. He was her girlhood's ideal but she had outgrown it. She had become too individualized by her independent life to go back into such a primitive state of existence. She sighed — she had found him just four years too late.

She knew now that that lodge of theirs was not to become the center from whence a message of hope should issue to those round about them. Even to preach in the wilderness would satisfy her. But no, it was not to be.

Calmly she tried to explain. "There is no fault to find with you, Caspar, you are just as dear and sweet a man as ever God made, but I am beginning to understand myself better. I thought I would be content to give up everything for you, but I find I am not."

"But Diantha," he protested, "this is a mere flash-in-the-pan with all those other things we have had to settle. Why, you almost gave up your country and I almost was on the point of giving up my mother in order to have peace, surely we can get over this difficulty some way, too."

She went on trying to explain. "You don't understand, Caspar," she said, resolutely. "We are like a pair of lions in the jungle all the time, we never give in to the other without an awful roaring. I once thought I would like this kind of absolute equality, but I find I do not. We both stand side by side. You do me too much honor to humor me as one would do with a child, and yet I believe that is what I want after all. I would have you more like a patient parent with a fractious child, more magnanimous."

"Very well, I will do as you wish," said he, full of contrition.

She looked him gravely in the eyes. "I am going to put you to the very last test," she said. "Will you let me establish a Henry George club in that dear lodge of ours?"

She waited while he wrestled with himself. He pulled at that lock of his as if he would tug it from his scalp. And then he groaned. "It is such foolishness!" he cried. "Why not belong to some church like other women do?"

She rose from her place to her tallest height.

"Not for the wealth of all the gold-valleys of the world, not even for the pleasure and joy of being by your side for the remainder of my natural life, will I give up my beloved Henry George society nor the principles he taught."

"If you care more for Henry George than you do for me," said Caspar, huskily, "it is a good thing for us to find it out in time!"

She looked at him yearningly. But there was that in

her nature that refused to be satisfied with being merely the slave of this man's affection, she told herself. She knew she must do for others or die. It was in her nature, and she would feel mentally cramped in such boundaries as these, exactly as Caspar described himself, physically, living in the chicken-coops of the flats and tiny spaces of the city. It would not be living.

"Yes," she said, calmly, "that is just my way of thinking."

So saying she left him there and turned away to the front-room to gather her shattered self together, and to try to find out who and what she really was. She would be a modern Joan of Arc in her small way, she thought to herself. She would never marry, but devote her life to the poor, and the girls who needed her. She would never marry, never be a Thusnelda. She went to the front-window by the fire-escape and looked out.

Already she felt as if the habit of the nun was beginning to enfold her apart from this day forth from all the world.

She could hear the merry voices in the dining-room. It was always like that when people's hearts were breaking.

It was indeed a pleasant time they were having all together over the peaches and cream. Gene made some frivolous remark about the "Hall of the Sacred Coal-box" and Colleen went to see how the lovers were getting on, preparatory "to shooing" them in to partake of the supper.

"What is the matter?" asked Everton with gleaming eyes.

“Oh, they are fighting as usual,” said Gene, bluntly. “Between you and me I don’t think they are going ‘to hit it off.’ We were talking to-day, about giving them some blue china for a wedding-gift, but I believe we are going to save our money.”

“Oh, Gene,” reproved Showery, “don’t talk like that!”

Colleen came in bringing Caspar, who was blinking from changing to the sudden glare of the lighted room after the dimness of the hall.

She piled his plate high and put on extra sugar and cream as if by this means to alleviate the miseries of love.

The girls began to make merry over some foolishness at John’s expense, which he took good-naturedly.

Everton’s eyes were fixed on Colleen. She gave him a significant nod, and he arose and made some excuse to them all, and went into the front-room.

CHAPTER LV

EVERTON MERELY LISTENS

DIANTHA was standing there still, looking out at the passing crowds below. She was wondering if among them all there were some with broken hearts who felt that everything in life had come to an end.

She heard some one come into the room but did not turn her head. She could feel herself getting calm and quiet all ready, even as if relieved from a great burden. She wondered to herself why it was that she was not at all unhappy.

Everton came close to her side and looked down at the crowds below also. It was some time before he spoke. Then he said, "What was that verse you recited to me, something about it being best we lost our friends?"

"'Tis best our earthly joys should end.
Though Summer, aye, though Love depart,
They'll come again to cheer the heart,
Sans sadness, sans alloy.'"

she answered him.

"Very — pretty — language," he said quaintly in a style quite of his own that always struck her poignantly, "and now I want to speak about something else."

She turned and looked at him straight.

"What did you mean when you said 'it was *my*

fault'?" He put the question to her with a tensity that gave additional force to the words.

That she was startled there was no doubt. "I don't know—exactly, I suppose it was because—" she stammered helplessly. "Why didn't you tell me that before?"

"Tell you what before?" he asked puzzled.

"That about, you know—your not really meaning what—you said last spring—about—those illusions, and that broken-down widow?"

He met her gaze with a half-smile of self-commiseration. "I suppose I had to suffer first before I could humble myself to it," he made reply.

"Oh," was all she said in return. Then she began afresh but in a most subdued manner. "It is awfully hard to understand a man, don't you think so? You said once they were all alike, do you remember, but I don't think so."

"No?" He was very subdued, too, but watchful under it all.

"There is such a thing as being too elemental, don't you think? A little modification is an improvement. The altogether elemental man is rather mediæval in his ideas about a wife, and that hardly does in the twentieth century." She seemed rather communing with herself than with another.

"I should think not," murmured Everton, with his hand creeping to his watch.

"Caspar is as sweet and clean a man as God ever made and I shall always admire him and love him as I do

my brother Dan. But a woman doesn't want to marry a man merely because she loves him, you can love lots of people you wouldn't dream of marrying! No, there must be something else besides, adaptability, magnanimity, understanding. I am too fond of having my own way ever to be happy with Caspar."

"You surprise me," Everton exclaimed, "isn't this rather sudden?"

"No," she murmured, "I have always known it down deep in my subconscious self. But I never realized the importance of it — till this noon. This noon the scales fell from my eyes, and I saw him as he really is, a nice, dear fellow, you know — he will always be that — but not the king of kings to me." She grew more intense with the thoughts swelling up for expression.

"His influence over me is not at all good — I can see myself degenerating into the mediæval woman to match him, in the years to come, overmastering his brute-force with cunning in order to do anything that seems to me to be nice and pleasant to do."

"Oh, surely not as bad as that!" exclaimed the man by her side.

She looked at the door apprehensively, as if some one might be within hearing. Then her voice fell to a tragic whisper.

"What do you think? He has compelled me to lie to him, already — me!" she repeated striking her breast. "I, who hate a liar as I do a snake or a spider, have told him lie after lie. He keeps us all in a state of terror for fear he will find out the truth, for even Colleen has had to lie to him. He requires it! Why, I should become

the mother of a breed of liars under such a sway as his, and for what? Simply because I love him? What nonsense! Gene's book is right," she exclaimed passionately, "only lunatics marry for love. No wonder they go banging at the door of the divorce court to get back their freedom; I know I should."

Everton was blinking with the suddenness of all this announcement. He had forgotten all about his watch. He could hardly stand up against all this tremendous force that poured from Diantha's outraged sense of justice.

"How does all this happen," he managed to ask in the lull. "I had no idea of all this?"

"Of course not," she said, giving a great sigh of relief. "Neither did I till to-day, at noon at our lunch, when the whole thing flashed over me like a revelation. You see, I am afraid of him!"

"Surely not; why, that is absurd," said he.

But she persisted. Her face was chiseled fine with her righteous indignation, her bosom was heaving with suppressed excitement, and her heart was like a bird rejoicing in finding freedom.

"Well, we all are!" she continued. "We are afraid he will decamp at a moment's notice if he doesn't like things. And we are so fond of him that we lie in order to keep him from flying off on a tangent, that's about the way of it. First I had to pretend I was the support of a large family of brothers and sisters, and therefore my salary was used up no matter what I earned, and therefore I was as poor as he, before he would consider it possible to like me. Oh, it is noble of him, of course —"

She took a fresh breath, "But I had to deceive him to get him, and it has been hellish to keep it up! Then he was not willing I should keep my father's name, and I gave in, then he required I should give up my country, and I told him I would if he would give up his mother, and now he wants me to give up my beloved Henry George! What do you think of that?"

"Impossible," was all he could say.

"Oh, yes, and we have had to invent an eccentric aunt for me in Boston to explain why these pictures on the walls are mine — Oh, it must come natural to women to lie, we do it so easily, we who hate the necessity for lying. Oh, I am glad my eyes were opened to-day!"

Some one came into the room. It was Colleen, mild and gentle as ever.

"Caspar is so sorry, Diantha, that he should have spoken as he did," she was beginning.

But Diantha waved her away. "No more, my dear Colleen," she said, wearily. "I have done with Caspar. I have told him my last lie. Now, you go and undeceive him about that poor old aunt of mine in Boston, for that you know is your lie, not mine."

"O Diantha," said Colleen in a fright, and turning very pale.

"You did it for me, dear," said Diantha, kissing her tenderly, to give her courage, "you wouldn't lie for yourself, we all know."

"But he will run away and never come back any more," protested Colleen.

"Do you hear that?" asked Diantha, significantly. "Do you see how terrorized we all are?"

“I never would have believed it, if I had not heard it with my own ears,” said Stanley.

“Let him go!” said Diantha, impatiently. “If he cannot bear the truth. ‘’Tis better ordered so.’”

A little cry involuntarily burst from Colleen’s lips. “Oh, but he will be so unhappy — and here all alone in the city with no one — O Diantha, how can you be so cruel? We can give him nice things to eat and make him comfortable and cheer him up!” And her voice died away while the blush of consciousness passed over her serene face.

“Do you hear that?” asked Diantha, “She’s got the madness now?” She turned to her friend and bade her break the news to him as gently as she liked but tell him about the fictional aunt, she must at once. Colleen squared herself for the contest, and went back into the hall.

CHAPTER LVI

“THE GREATEST JOY IN THE WORLD”

GENE and the girls at the table were amusing themselves, having fun at the expense of John Quincy, while Gene began to hint that another “Sacred Coal-Box” would be needed in that flat of theirs.

“It’s just like looking at the monkeys in their cages at the Zoo,” said Seddie, and she ventured to take a peep into the dimly lighted hall, coming back full of mystery. “I’m thinking we shall have need of three if things keep on the way they are going. What do you think? Why it is Colleen that is sitting there with Caspar!”

“Oh, my goodness!” cried Gene. “They’ll have to take her with them to that lodge of theirs for a peacemaker. Isn’t it awful to think that lovers have to fight so all the time. Shall you and Anna begin pretty soon, John?”

John smiled contentedly. “What for?” he asked. “Whatever she thinks is right will go with me.”

Out in the dim hall, Colleen was trying to select her words carefully.

“Diantha says that there is something I must tell you,” she began. “I have a confession to make to you, and I am so scared, I don’t know how to do it.”

Caspar smiled at the very idea. “Scared? You, Colleen?” he exclaimed. “I don’t believe it, you are just fooling.”

"I am more scared of you than I am of all the wild beasts in the world," she replied timidly.

"Why, what are you scared of?" He was laughing at her.

"You had better stop laughing," she said warningly, "for you are going to be so mad in another minute that you are going to run away from us all and never come back again, any more, not even for your hat," she added, comically, in the midst of her misery.

"Oh, well! you can keep it for a souvenir," he said jocosely.

"That's quite an idea," said she, much pleased. "Give me leave to go and get it now?"

"Why, yes, of course!" he still thought it a great joke.

Colleen ran and took the hat from the rack. She looked around to see that no one was in sight, then slowly lifted the soft felt to her lips as if thereby she would exorcise all evil spirits from the owner and make him more mild.

She went into the parlor, where Diantha and Stanley were sitting down now and conversing earnestly. "I've got his hat," she said, excitedly, "he gave me leave, before I would tell him."

"'Gave me leave,'" repeated Diantha, pitifully, "Oh, poor Colleen!"

Everton arose and went to the door. "You leave Caspar to me," he said indulgently, "I'll see he doesn't run off, I'll make him behave himself."

When he returned Diantha was sitting looking at the floor.

"They are suited to each other and that is the main thing," she said abstractedly.

He went and stood by her side. "I wish we were suited to each other," he said gently.

She sighed. "Of course it is a great disappointment to me to think that Caspar and I are not able to —"

"Not able 'to hit it off' is what Miss Lenore calls it," suggested Stanley, trying to help her out.

"That will do as well as anything," she said impassively, "after all this mortal combat and struggle of will. For, of course, I am of a domestic temperament. And I had looked forward to coming to anchor and finding a haven of peace."

"A haven of peace," he echoed, "that is what I am longing for, too. You and I understand each other, we can work together, I love you, Diantha, why not marry me?"

"Oh, no, that is impossible," she said with a sigh. "I shall never marry now. Men are too weird. Why should I expect you to be different from the rest?"

She looked up and met his reproachful glance.

"Have I not been patient?" he said. "Have I not let you have your own way for a long time? And have I not suffered?"

She was silent.

"Besides we have a lot to do together and no time to waste. We want to get to work for those children, you know, and plan those schemes of yours for the betterment of the world. And we must give a little of our time to deciding whether we are going to live in the city or the country, and how we are going to help Caspar

without hurting his pride and a thousand things that lie near our hearts."

"You are well named, 'Everybody's Friend,'" she said quietly.

"But what is that if I am going to lose you? O Diantha, I cannot endure any more. I have been trying to make myself over, to be more worthy of you in all your goodness and womanly charm. I want a woman like you by my side to work for and to love for the rest of my life."

He knelt down before her and took her hand in his.

She looked at him piteously. "O Stanley, if you had a wife, you wouldn't be mean and cross to her, would you, ever? If only you would let her love you, if only you would try to be—the man of her heart—be more generous to her than to all the rest of the world! You wouldn't thwart her in every innocent little thing she wanted to do. Promise me that you would let her be free—for the sake of—" The tears were raining down her cheeks and she gave way to her emotions without restraint.

Stanley drew her head to his shoulder. "I know—I understand," he said in a low voice, "for the sake of that little son and that little daughter that will be coming to dwell with me, I should let my wife be free! And I shall also keep on trying to be worthy of them as well as of you, especially of that little daughter, for I want to be to her what your father was to you. To me, that would be the greatest joy in the world."

CHAPTER LVII

CASPAR NOT ELEMENTAL, ONLY A NATURAL MAN

THERE was a sound of confusion in the hall and peals of laughter came with it. Presently there was the sound as of some one falling heavily upon the floor.

“Look at your watch,” exclaimed Diantha, “is it twelve?”

He spoke impulsively. “I will be perfectly frank with you, dearest, we’ll have no lies between us ever, but I don’t want to look at my watch! I have made you set the date for our marriage by saying that I would leave at twelve and not come back if you didn’t but I am quite sure it is already past twelve. You shall see that there shall be nothing but the truth between us two, always. And now I must go and help poor Colleen.”

“Just a second,” entreated Diantha, “one word more, I know that by marrying a native of this country that I shall become a citizen, but I am not satisfied, I shall go to-morrow and take out naturalization papers myself so that nothing shall stand between us, not even my country!”

“My dear! my dear!” he said brokenly, “but never mind, we’ll go and visit Canada, every summer, together, and your people shall be my people, to make it up to

you! I must go and see what is the matter with those children out there, isn't it fearful the way they are carrying on? You need some parents around here pretty badly."

As he left her there to herself there came over her something of the calm and sanctity of marriage as if like another Undine, all the devils had been cast out of her. With the union of their minds and the union of their souls, it seemed as if already the marriage had been consummated without need of the "Man of God" or the "Man of the Law" to set upon it the seal of public sanction. She comprehended then something of the awful mystery of marriage, its tragedy when the twain were not mated, and the infinite peace of it when they were. It came to her as in a flash of light that the ceremony of marriage was instituted by man himself in all kindness for the protection of the woman and the child, and necessary for the well-being of the family as long as that peace should endure. But without that peace it would be a more horrible hell than any conception of the Dark Ages to the ones caught in its thrall. And that there must be the mating in the eyes of God as well as the marriage in the eyes of man to make it a true union.

As Everton appeared at the door there was a cry going up from the girls. "Hold him! John, hold him!" came from a chorus of voices.

The revelation which had been made to Caspar by Colleen, that she herself had invented the rich old aunt in Boston to help Diantha conceal the fact of her having some money of her own, had aroused his deepest scorn.

In spite of Colleen's entreaties for him to forgive Diantha, he had refused utterly to remain a moment longer or ever to see her again.

"To be deceived once is enough for me," he had said grimly.

But Colleen, relying on Everton's promise "to make Caspar behave," had stationed John and the girls in the hall urging upon them not to let him escape until he had forgiven her and Diantha for the lies they had been compelled to tell him.

There they were all waiting, determined on that point as he strode for the door, and so in a moment there was a struggle and a battle for the mastery such as only the very young and irresponsible ever indulge in. Caspar had pushed them all out of the way when John fell down upon the floor and seized hold of his legs to hold him by main force, while the girls joined in afresh closing in around him to bar the way and entreating him to forgive Diantha.

During the struggle of the young giants, Showery being the least to blame had been stepped on, and was now sitting on the floor weaving backwards and forwards over her crushed foot, laughing and crying together at the outrageousness of it all.

Altogether it was a scene not to be expected in Pleiades Court, top flat.

"What is the trouble?" asked Everton mildly.

After explanations Colleen added, "He says he will never come back again," and she began to weep.

"I have been deceived," exclaimed Caspar, sternly —

"I have no wish to associate with people who tell me lies."

"Easy, easy, Caspar," interposed, Everton, "you know we men have to overlook little things like that in the women-folks when they do it only out of kindness of heart and with the best intentions. Sometimes we make it hard for them to tell the truth and then it is our own fault. Miss March is waiting for you, she has an explanation to make — and Caspar," he added more firmly, "try to control your temper, she is feeling sorry enough as it is."

While Everton was assuring Colleen that everything would come out all right, Caspar walked into the room where Diantha was awaiting him.

She stood up and looked at him in an impersonal way. It was nothing more to her that his eyes were blue, nor that the vagrant lock was hanging down upon his forehead. With that peculiar quality that goes with potential motherhood, it was because he had been hers, because he had been her possession absolutely, that she had conceived such an almost-fierce fondness for him.

Possession is nine points in love as well as in law.

Now everything was all changed. He no longer belonged to her, she had detached herself from him, and had transferred herself, just as absolutely.

"Is it true," began Caspar, "or is it not true, that you have an aunt in Boston, that she is the source of all your gifts?"

Diantha did not hesitate a moment. She had made up her mind what to do.

"I do not ask you to forgive me, Caspar," she said, "for it is the truth that I have been deceiving you all this time. There never was such an aunt, she is merely a fiction. I have nobody dependent on me, and I have about eight thousand dollars all in my own name that I have earned and added to by investments. I am awfully sorry to think I should have had to tell you a lie like that, but you made it necessary. For you know you told me you would tear me out of your heart, forever, if ever I deceived you; and you know it is against your principles to marry a girl who has more money than you have."

"That is quite true," said Caspar, hoarsely, fairly rigid with rage at these cold-blooded revelations.

"But that is no reason why we should not part friends, is it, Caspar?" asked Diantha, extending her hand, "for to-day, noon, I found out that I had made a mistake. Last spring, Mr. Everton asked me to marry him, but I preferred to go to Boulder Camp and find an elemental man instead. Mr. Everton bet me a thousand dollars I couldn't find one and if I couldn't I was to come back and marry him. And all this time I have been deceiving myself — for to-day, noon, I discovered that it was he I cared for, all the time. And I have decided to marry Mr. Everton, four weeks from Wednesday."

Caspar drew away from the proffered hand she held out to him, and viewed her with horror.

"I am sure," she went on, "that you will find some girl far more suitable than I who will make you happy. And you deserve it; for I still maintain, and always shall, that you are one of the sweetest and cleanest men God ever made. But you are also as stubborn as a mule and

as fierce as a lion. And as I am the same way, I know we are not suited to each other, and that it is a great mercy we have found it out before it is too late."

Caspar regained utterance finally. "And Mr. Everton — knew about it — all the time? He stood at the foot of the peak when I was asking you to marry me? He saved you from going over the cliff, for me? He brought me East and gave me opportunities to better myself, all for your sake? He could do all that and endure all that? God! How he must have suffered! And you delighted in torturing him, a man like that! Over my shoulders?" Caspar's voice rang out scornfully. "Oh, it takes a woman to indulge in the refinements of brutality! You've treated *him* far worse than you've even treated *me*. He may forgive you for it, but I never will, making me into a cat's-paw for the furtherance of your Jezebel arts and coquetries."

Diantha had prayed for a Parsifal, pure and undefiled, and she had found him. However, she no more than any other woman, had been prepared to discover in him a dangerous being to rouse, one who was stern and implacable, which is the compensation and penalty of purity in a man. For without these resistant qualities how shall a man maintain his crystallineness of heart? She had found him, but he was too great and splendid for her, and like the most of women, when it came to the test, she discovered that she preferred the one who was not a Parsifal, who even had a past, or maybe because of it, was more gracious, more easy-going, who had more arts, more finesse, more gallantries and indulgences for her sex.

Even in spite of her natural courage, Caspar awakened her fear and she shrank from him when she saw the havoc she had made with that faithful heart that had never loved before. She was afraid of him and what he might do in his rage and scorn at her; for there was a glitter in his eyes as if he would do murder. His breath came fast as he gazed at her, with the elemental passions of jealousy and outraged love, and desire for vengeance sweeping over him. Another moment and she might lie in his arms crushed to a shapeless heap.

In that terrible moment he was meditating how he could kill her and Everton and then himself. They had played him false and they deserved to die. His face was drawn and white. Some one was venturing to pluck at his sleeve and calling him by name, but he scarcely heard.

"Why, Caspar," repeated the voice of Colleen, "don't look like that! Surely you are not going to fly into such a passion over that poor old aunt I made up just to help poor Diantha out?"

Caspar drew his hand across his eyes like one awakening from a dream and came to his senses slowly. He looked down at Colleen, finally, and said, "It seems — that Diantha — is going to marry — Mr. Everton — four weeks from Wednesday."

"What?" exclaimed Colleen, "why, she must be mad!" Caspar smiled terribly.

"I am ashamed of her," Colleen went on recklessly, "no wonder you look like that."

The tension let go, his face relaxed. "She isn't worth it," he said, finally, taking a full breath, "I'll get over it."

"Oh, yes, she is worth it," protested Colleen loyally.

"Diantha is a fine splendid girl and I understand her perfectly. She is going to marry Stanley Everton for peace of mind. Caspar, you know you nearly drove her wild!"

His fierce mood was passing as he tried to comprehend, for Colleen's accents had a soothing effect upon him. "You know, Caspar," she exclaimed, trying to make him think of something else than Diantha, "you are — so — outrageously elemental!"

"No, I am not," he said hoarsely, "if I were I would kill her and Everton, and hurl myself from a rock into the sea, but I don't. I let her live!" And he tried to smile but there was a quiver on his lips and there were tears in his eyes so darkly blue. "I am not elemental at all — I am only a natural man."

He turned to go and she spoke gently, "Caspar, you must stop and speak to Mr. Everton a moment, he is your friend."

He steadied himself and took a breath and said, "Yes, Mr. Everton is a man to admire and he is too good for — her!" Then he passed from the room as a wounded creature that would fain hide itself from every eye in the depths of the forest.

CHAPTER LVIII

DIANTHA KISSES THE HAND OF HER MASTER

THE girls came in hushed and pale at sight of Caspar's white set face, leaving him and Everton together. What they said no one knew, but that they fell back on their friendship, as man to man, there was no doubt; for they seemed to come to an understanding.

Diantha was pale, too. She tried to thank Colleen for her kindness to Caspar. "He needs somebody to be kind to him," she said brokenly. "And you, Colleen, you already love him."

"Yes," said Colleen with drooping head, "I must have been fond of him from the first, but I did not know for certain till to-day — at noon."

"Yes, we all had an awakening to-day," said Diantha.

Gene came and kissed her and whispered a word of congratulation. Showery said she thought love must be a terrible thing when it caused such suffering. In contrast stood John and Anna, hand-in-hand, like two happy children who could not understand pain or sorrow.

When Stanley returned to tell Diantha that he had made his peace with Caspar and that he was going to make him the manager of the new plant out at Boulder Camp, and look out for his future, Diantha gave way to

an impulsive emotion aroused by commingled gratitude and admiration.

In her humility and in her contrition for all the suffering she had caused him, she bent her head quickly and before he could prevent her, she had kissed him on the hand.

Thus had she sometimes done in her childhood with her father in earnest of her desire for his forgiveness. She did not wear a *yashmak* and yet she kissed the hand of her master. She was filled with child-like content to find that he did not dwell on some far-off pinnacle of resistance to her every wish and thought, but came down to her, as a loving parent to a child, putting her happiness before his own, out of the desire of his heart to see her at peace and rest.

She remembered, too, that she had caused him pain and suffering, which she had not known until Caspar had revealed it to her. She had not meant to do it. She was sorry.

As she took his hand between her two, and laid it against her cheek in abandonment to the emotion that swayed her, while the tears rained upon it as if in expiation, Everton was trembling. He felt his heart beat in a great throb as a sense of unworthiness shattered him to the center of his being. He was overwhelmed at this child-like manifestation of her love, and symbol of her dependence upon him for the days coming.

"Don't, dearest!" he entreated brokenly, yet he attempted to smile, as a strong man should whatever befall, "I cannot bear it — I am so — unworthy —" and

he took her hands in his own and kissed them both gently.

Diantha looked into his blue eyes through the mists of contrition and replied, "No — you are magnanimous and good. Even Caspar — says you are a man to admire."

AFTERWORD

And what then? Were they happy ever after? They were. Did Caspar marry Colleen? Yes. And did Caspar and Diantha ever meet again? Once. It was at a reception of the Henry Georgeites who were celebrating a victory in having at last gotten a bill through by which in New York, the land-values and property-values were to be henceforth taxed separately, and the Single-Taxers were very happy. Diantha had just returned from Europe, Colleen was fresh from California.

They fell into each other's arms with joy. And then upon the scene came a man who seemed to begrudge them to each other. It was Caspar with a little girl by the hand, while on his arm he carried a small baby in long clothes. He was unashamed and unabashed, bearded once more, and full of his old-time domination. He had grown tired of waiting at the hotel for Colleen and had come to find her, and announced she had been there long enough.

Thus it was they met. As water will wear away the stone, so Colleen had smoothed away some of his brusqueness, but not all. He was so absorbed in his own children he forgot to ask about those of any one else. His bright smile flashed up as of yore, nevertheless Colleen followed him meekly when he gave his quick nod of farewell and strode for the door.

And Diantha turned swiftly and flew to the waiting-

room where an elderly sister stood, holding by the hand a beautiful, sturdy little boy. She fell upon her knees before him, holding out her arms.

"Come to mother," she said. And with the light of understanding in his eyes, as if he knew all her moods, he came to her indulgently, as it were, and put his arms about her neck.

"It was for your sake, my little Stanley," she said, fervently, full of the glory of her motherhood. "Thank God!"



THE END

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